

# **UNDERSTANDING THE “VICTORY DISEASE,” FROM THE LITTLE BIGHORN, TO MOGADISHU, TO THE FUTURE**

**A Monograph  
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## ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE “VICTORY DISEASE,” FROM THE LITTLE BIGHORN, TO MOGADISHU, TO THE FUTURE by MAJOR Timothy M. Karcher, United States Army, 67 pages.

As a result of the national strength of the United States (US) and the demonstrated prowess of her military, US forces are quite susceptible to falling prey to the effects of the “Victory Disease.” The Victory Disease brings defeat to a previously victorious nation or military, through a compounding of three basic symptoms. The symptoms of the Victory Disease are arrogance, complacency, and the habit of using established patterns to solve military problems. These symptoms are evident in many military failures.

The growth of the Victory Disease can best be analyzed through the study of historical examples. In these examples, the symptoms of the Victory Disease become quite clear. This monograph uses the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn and the 1993 actions of Task Force Ranger in Mogadishu, Somalia, to highlight the symptoms and effect of the Victory Disease.

The overall goal of studying the Victory Disease is to learn how to avoid succumbing to its effects, thus seeking a vaccination to this debilitating disease. The only real vaccine for the Victory Disease is found in increased study of military history in the Officer Education System, particularly focusing on campaigns and battles where defeat may be attributed to the Victory Disease. Thus, simple awareness of the problem provides one with the ability to avoid falling prey to the Victory Disease.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Today, the United States (US) is the sole remaining global “superpower.” Until recently, the US and the Soviet Union had balanced one another as two opposing superpowers, leading the Western democracies and the communist eastern block, respectively. This balance of power in a bipolar world actually brought a tenuous peace for over forty years, but eventually, the US gained the distinction as the sole superpower due to the failure of the Soviet State in the late twentieth century. With this prominence came a great responsibility, and the Cold War victory along with America’s rise as the superpower gave many Americans great comfort, while it should also be viewed as a potential source of concern.

To go along with its status as the sole superpower, the US has a fine tradition of military proficiency, and a historical string of victories that many nations view with envy. The US military has been victorious in nearly every major war it has fought, suffering its only real defeat during the protracted war in Vietnam, in the 1960s and 1970s. Even there, the US military accumulated victories at the tactical level of war, but ultimately failed to achieve ambiguous strategic aims and objectives, resulting in a final strategic defeat for the US. Since the Vietnam War, the US military has accumulated a string of quick, decisive victories in the Caribbean and the Middle East, ending with the US-led coalition’s overwhelming victory over Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War. This event highlighted America’s military dominance for the world to see.

Unfortunately, America’s position as the sole global superpower with her tradition of military might brings about a mind-set that makes her highly susceptible to defeat on future battlefields. This mind-set is sometimes referred to as the “Victory Disease,” and is an all too frequent by-product of national strength. Military analysts James Dunnigan and Raymond Macedonia highlight the concept of the Victory Disease in their work, *Getting It Right: American Military Reforms After Vietnam to the Gulf War and Beyond*. According to Dunnigan and

Macedonia, the Victory Disease threatens a nation with a history of military prowess and manifests itself in three basic “symptoms;” arrogance, a sense of complacency, and the habit of using established patterns to fight future conflicts.<sup>1</sup> As these symptoms compound, the overall result may be the unanticipated defeat of a previously victorious nation. However, it is important to note that the Victory Disease will not always lead to battlefield defeat, but simply increases the likelihood of failure, or perceived failure, for a force afflicted by the malady. Since it appears that the conditions exist for the US to fall prey to the Victory Disease, the question must be asked, can the US Army avoid the effects of the Victory Disease, and thereby decrease the likelihood of military disasters in future operations?

### The Victory Disease

While the Victory Disease makes the US highly susceptible to defeat as a result of past victories, to truly understand this disease, one must first analyze the symptoms. This analysis of the symptoms illustrates the weakness of a nation suffering from the Victory Disease.

Arrogance manifests itself in the military mind-set in several ways. First, the military force suffering from the symptom of arrogance views itself as nearly invincible. This feeling of invincibility comes from a high level of demonstrated military prowess and allows military leaders and planners to believe that their forces can defeat almost any foe. This sense of invincibility also seeps into the national psyche, causing national leaders and ordinary citizens to expect their military to be able to produce overwhelming victories in any future conflict, against any potential enemy. Along with this feeling of invincibility comes the habit of underestimating one’s potential enemies. Since the arrogant opponent views his own forces as invincible, the enemy hardly rates a vote in the potential outcome of a future war or battle. Thus, the sense of arrogance quickly leads to a sense of complacency.

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<sup>1</sup>James Dunnigan and Raymond Macedonia, *Getting It Right: American Military Reforms After Vietnam to the Gulf War and Beyond* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), 21.

The sense of complacency on the part of political and military leaders and planners is a further symptom of the Victory Disease. Since the Army is viewed as invincible and the enemy is seen as hardly able to affect the outcome of a battle, military leaders and planners become complacent in the planning and execution of campaigns and battles. The analysis of an enemy is seen as virtually unnecessary, resulting in a very limited understanding of the enemy's capabilities and potential courses of action, and causing military leaders and planners to virtually take the enemy for granted. This feeling of arrogance, coupled with a sense of complacency, is likely to cause leaders and planners to use established patterns.

The US Army education system continually points out that there is no "school solution" or "cookie-cutter solution" to military problems, as each new problem must be viewed within its own particular context. Unfortunately, the Victory Disease leads the military leader and planner to seek these through a use of established patterns. A military leader or planner afflicted by this symptom sees the decisive impact of past solutions and believes that if they are used in future conflicts, these techniques will yield similar results. Since an army views its forces as vastly superior to the enemy, military leaders and planners adopt an attitude of: "it has worked in the past, why change?"

The greatest danger in using established patterns comes from the enemy's reaction. Setting a pattern is fine, as long as the enemy follows with his own established patterns, reacting in similar fashion. A significant danger occurs when the enemy deviates from his normal reaction, placing the friendly force at a significant disadvantage, causing the supposed "recipe for success" to turn into a "recipe for failure."

These symptoms, building on one another, develop into a full-blown, possibly fatal, case of the Victory Disease. The danger of the Victory Disease is that it allows one's enemies to easily template their responses to a given stimuli. Since military leaders and planners suffering from the Victory Disease are likely to use an established pattern, the enemy is able to predict their

actions and seize the initiative. A basic principle of war espoused by the US Army is that of maintaining the initiative in all military action, as opposed to reacting to the enemy's actions. Thus, a military suffering from the Victory Disease is quite likely to lose the initiative to the enemy. Herein lies the greatest danger of the Victory Disease.

In an effort to clearly explain the symptoms, this monograph highlights the extremes, but seldom are these symptoms as obvious as they may seem from this brief explanation. The perspective of hindsight also enhances the obviousness of these symptoms, but one must avoid the urge to judge past national and military leaders since clarity comes through the prism of historical analysis. The danger of these symptoms comes from how easily and gradually they creep into the mind-set of military leaders and planners, thus manifesting themselves in the campaign plan. The overall goal of this paper is to not only describe this insidious threat to battlefield success, but to recommend ways to “vaccinate” military leaders and planners, thus preventing them from falling prey to the effects of the Victory Disease.

#### Organization of This Study

Historical evaluation clearly illustrates the symptoms of the Victory Disease and how they interact to bring about failure. This monograph will use two very different examples to illustrate the symptoms and the end results of the Victory Disease and to show its persistence through history. In the initial example, this paper examines a tactical failure, which in turn galvanized the nation to pursue an eventual strategic victory. The second example illustrates the Victory Disease in a significantly different context. In this case, a tactical victory yields an eventual strategic failure, primarily due to unexpected casualties and ambiguous strategic aims. Both examples will illustrate the effects of the Victory Disease on military leaders and planners and on the national leadership and populace as a whole.



## The Battle of the Little Bighorn

Chapter 2 focuses on perhaps the best single example of the Victory Disease from American History, the Battle of the Little Bighorn. On 25 June 1876, on a ridgeline overlooking the Little Bighorn River, Lieutenant Colonel (Brevet Major General) George A. Custer and five companies of the 7th US Cavalry were killed by hostile Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. The famous Battle of the Little Bighorn, or “Custer’s Last Stand” as it is commonly referred to, clearly illustrates a direct cause and effect relationship between the symptoms of the Victory Disease and the outcome of a tactical battle. Even more interesting is the effect that this shock had on the nation as a whole, spurring the populace to demand a final victory over the hostile Plains tribes.

In this example, one clearly sees all of the symptoms of the Victory Disease. A nation, reunited after a bloody civil war, expanded along the western frontier, coming into violent contact with the indigenous population, the Plains Indians. The US Army, flush from its victory over the Confederacy, viewed the Indians with contempt, thus underestimating the Indian’s capacity to wage war. As the US Army gained experience fighting the Indians, patterns or techniques emerged, dictating “how” one should go about defeating the Indians. These three symptoms combined to produce a shocking and unprecedented tactical defeat of American arms at the hands of the Plains Indians.

In this case, the tactical defeat so shocked the nation, on the eve of its Centennial celebration, that the populace demanded victory over the hostile Plains Indians. Therefore, in the case of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Victory Disease brought about the tactical defeat that ultimately yielded victory at the national-strategic level of war. In analyzing the Battle of the Little Bighorn, this monograph focuses on the negative effects of the Victory Disease at the tactical level of war.

### Task Force Ranger in Mogadishu, Somalia

Chapter 3 examines the second primary example of the effects of the Victory Disease, this time coming from more recent times. It focuses on the actions of Task Force Ranger (TF Ranger) in Mogadishu, Somalia on 3 and 4 October 1993. In this example, the effects of the Victory Disease are most evident at strategic and operational levels of war, while the symptoms still remain evident at the tactical level, only to a lesser degree. As a result, the battle yielded a tactical victory, albeit at some cost, but resulted in a strategic defeat due to the effects of the Victory Disease.

In this example, the symptoms of the disease are again evident, only this time across a greater spectrum. Again, the US, so recently the dominant force in the Persian Gulf War against Iraq, encountered a tribal culture, this time on the African Continent. Based on their almost bloodless victory over Saddam Hussein, senior American policy makers believed the dominance of American military technology would easily prevail over the Somali factions and clans. At the tactical level of war, elite forces, by their very nature extremely self-confident, found themselves pitted against a Third World adversary. During the actual execution, TF Ranger used the same technique as had been used on six previous missions. In this case, the three symptoms again combined, resulting in a national defeat. Despite failure at the national-strategic level, a company-sized element (approximately 100 elite US soldiers) was able to hold off an enemy force of over 1,000 Somali clansmen and was ultimately extracted by a US-led multinational relief force, resulting in a tactical victory.

Although this action was a tactical success, the resulting loss of eighteen US soldiers shocked US strategic policy makers who found themselves under the effects of the Victory Disease. At the highest levels of the US Government, policy makers were unable to reconcile these significant casualties with their ambiguous strategic aims and objectives, causing the eventual withdrawal of all US forces from the region. Thus, the TF Ranger example highlights

the effects of the Victory Disease at all levels of war, focusing primarily on the strategic and operational levels.

### The Road Ahead

Once the Victory Disease and its symptoms are clearly understood, the next step is to seek a vaccine. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on further analyzing the symptoms and attempting to find ways to prevent the military leader and planner from being afflicted by this disease. Potential vaccinations for the Victory Disease come from a variety of sources. First, the Officer Education System (OES) yields possible solutions, through the increased study of military history, focused on highlighting past examples of the Victory Disease. Knowledge of the disease and its symptoms will likely yield increased vigilance on the part of military leaders and planners, making them less likely to succumb to the effects of this disease. The Army's planning doctrine is another source of possible vaccines. Many of the symptoms of the Victory Disease are rooted in assumptions, which are generated during the planning process. Thus, a great need exists to challenge one's assumptions during the planning process, to ensure that the effects of the Victory Disease are not finding their way into the plan.

### The Significance of This Study

The goal of this paper is to recommend ways to prevent the US Army from falling prey to the effects of the Victory Disease in future conflicts. Since the Victory Disease results in defeat, the importance of vaccinating military leaders and planners to the effects of this disease are evident. As the US possibly prepares to take action against Iraq as part of the ongoing "War on Terrorism," a great potential exists for military leaders and planners to succumb to the effects of the Victory Disease.

US Military leaders and planners, along with their political leaders and the nation's populace must not fall prey to the effects of the Victory Disease. Every potential conflict must be

analyzed within its own specific context. The nation must not see future conflicts as a “Desert Storm Equivalent,” in which US Forces will easily, and almost bloodlessly, achieve victory over any foe.<sup>2</sup> To have this mind-set only invites disaster.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 30.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

As a case study to analyze the effects of the Victory Disease, there exist few finer historical examples than the Battle of the Little Bighorn in June 1876. Prior to attempting to determine the effect of the Victory Disease on this operation, one must understand how the overall campaign and the ensuing battle on the Little Bighorn River came to pass. This paper will then further explore the symptoms of the Victory Disease and how they contributed to the military failure of Custer's 7th Cavalry.

#### The Clash of Cultures

For years, US society had been moving westward, coming into increasingly violent contact with the Northern Plains Indians. Initially, white settlers passed through the Great Plains en route to the gold fields of California or western Montana, but with the end of the American Civil War, serious westward expansion began again in earnest. Roads through Indian Territory and construction of transcontinental railroads caused increasing tension between these two societies, and the US Army was more frequently called upon to combat hostile Indians throughout the Great Plains. The inevitable clash between white society and the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne tribes came to a head toward the end of the nineteenth century.

In large part due to Custer's expedition into the Black Hills in 1874 and the resulting discovery of gold, a steady stream of miners and prospectors had been entering this area, which the Sioux considered sacred. This white encroachment on the Black Hills, the sacred area known to the Sioux as the *Pa Sapa*, was perhaps the final event that forced the two societies into violent conflict.<sup>1</sup> The encroachment on sacred Sioux territory was in direct violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty made between the US and the Sioux Nation, which granted to the Sioux almost

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<sup>1</sup>Edgar I. Stewart, *Custer's Luck* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 62.

all of present-day South Dakota west of the Missouri River as their reservation. This treaty further granted the Sioux “unceded Indian territory” east of the Bighorn Mountains and north of the North Platte River, which in essence was also off-limits to white settlers and travelers.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, the US Army attempted to keep miners and prospectors out of the area, thus enforcing the treaty granting the Black Hills to the Sioux. Eventually, President Grant, yielding to political pressure, took steps toward opening the Black Hills to white miners. His hopes of renegotiating the treaty with the Sioux to gain legal access to the Black Hills were impeded by a segment of the Sioux Nation commonly referred to as the “nontreaty Sioux.”<sup>3</sup> These nontreaty Sioux were also frequently referred to as “roamers” due to their disdain for the static reservation life tolerated by many Sioux.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of his failure to renegotiate the treaty to purchase the Black Hills, in November of 1875, President Grant instructed his military commanders that while orders forbidding miners and prospectors from entering the region stood, the military was to take no action to enforce those orders.<sup>5</sup> President Grant further ordered all Sioux and Northern Cheyenne roamers to return to their reservations by 31 January 1876, or be deemed “hostile” and turned over to the War Department for such action as deemed proper under the circumstances.<sup>6</sup> The fact

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<sup>2</sup>John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>3</sup>The “nontreaty Sioux” were those who preferred the wild, traditional existence over reservation living, thereby refusing to live under the rules and treaties of white society. In addition to the nontreaty Sioux, came a segment of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, who allied themselves with these Sioux, due to their similar desire to live the traditional, nomadic existence of the Plains Tribes. It is not surprising that these nontreaty Indians came into direct and violent contact with the encroaching whites, who were seen spoiling hunting grounds and disrupting their traditional, nomadic lifestyles.

<sup>4</sup>“Roamers” came in two varieties. The more committed “winter roamers,” never inhabited the reservations, living the traditional, nomadic existence, year-round. The “summer roamers” were a segment of the reservation population that left the reservation during the summer, to live the traditional lifestyle during the easier summer months, and returned to the reservations for the harsh winter months.

<sup>5</sup>Stewart, *Custer’s Luck*, 69.

<sup>6</sup>Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 34.

that the harsh winter climate on the Northern Plains made it virtually impossible for the Sioux and Cheyenne roamers to obey this presidential edict has been lost on many historians. Regardless, on 4 February 1876 with the passing of this deadline, Lieutenant General Phillip Sheridan, commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, ordered a campaign that would ultimately lead Custer and the 7th Cavalry to confront a huge assembly of Sioux and Northern Cheyenne on the banks of the Little Bighorn River almost five months later.

### The Centennial Campaign

Sheridan's plan called for immediate action against the hostiles, as military leaders on the frontier viewed winter campaigns as the most likely way to bring the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne to decisive battle. Experience had shown that summer campaigns only produced endless marches in search of the elusive foe; while during the winter months, the Indians were more easily surprised in their often snow-bound villages.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, if a village could be destroyed or captured during the winter, the combined effects of the military action and the harsh climate of the Northern Plains in essence defeated the Indians. A winter campaign had the additional advantage of facing less opponents, as many roamers preferred to winter in the relative comfort of the reservation, only leaving the reservations after the spring grass came in. Thus, the winter roamers were fewer in number, generally believed to be composed of approximately 800 warriors, who were likely to be spread across a variety of smaller villages due to the difficulty of feeding a large village during the winter months.

Sheridan ordered Generals George Crook and Alfred Terry, commanding the Department of the Platte and the Department of Dakota respectively, to attack toward the hostile bands thought to be located along the Yellowstone River in the Montana Territory.<sup>8</sup> General Terry

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<sup>7</sup>Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indians 1866-1891* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 248.

<sup>8</sup>Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 36.

further ordered Col John Gibbon, commander of the District of Montana, to participate in this campaign.<sup>9</sup> As envisioned, Sheridan's plan would consist of three converging columns with Terry advancing westward from Fort Abraham Lincoln, near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, as Gibbon moved in from the west, advancing from Fort Shaw, north of present-day Helena, Montana, and finally, Crook attacking north from Fort Fetterman, located along the North Platte River, near present-day Douglas, Wyoming. Within this campaign, Sheridan did not envision mutual support between columns, but seems to have believed that the converging nature of the attack would be more likely to locate the village and defeat the hostiles. The overall goal of these converging columns was to locate the hostile village, bring the Indians to battle, and in defeating them, force them onto the reservations. It is important here to note that all of the military commanders viewed any of these independent columns as having the necessary strength to defeat the hostiles without support from another force.

### The Winter Campaign

Sheridan's plan for a winter campaign did not come to pass due to the inability of his subordinates to quickly prepare for and execute a winter campaign on the frozen Northern Plains. Only General Crook was able to mount a winter expedition, launching a mixed force of cavalry and infantry numbering almost 900 soldiers, on 28 February 1876.<sup>10</sup> This force surprised a small village of Sioux and Northern Cheyenne along the Powder River on 17 March 1876. Although the village, of approximately 100 lodges, was destroyed and the Indian pony herd captured, the victory was limited as the Indian casualties were light; the warriors subsequently recaptured the majority of the pony herd; and nearby hostiles took in their beleaguered kinsmen, providing respite from the harsh winter climate.<sup>11</sup> All the while, General Terry and Colonel Gibbon were

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>10</sup>Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 248.

<sup>11</sup>Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 55-58.



unable to mount winter expeditions, thus Crook's attack on the village on the Powder River only served notice to the hostiles that the US Army was preparing to make good on Grant's ultimatum to force the hostiles on to the reservations.<sup>12</sup> Thus, with the failure of the winter campaign, the commanders began to plan for a similar operation to occur in the spring.

### The Spring-Summer Campaign

With Sheridan's plans for a winter campaign in shambles, his commanders began to prepare for an early spring campaign, in hopes of catching the hostiles before the summer roamers left the reservations and reinforced them. The military commanders still estimated that the Indian village would consist of less than 1,000 warriors, even though information to the contrary existed as early as May 1876.<sup>13</sup> During April and May 1876, the planned columns took the field. Terry and Gibbon working from the east and west, respectively, communicated and cooperated, with Terry serving as the overall commander of the Montana and Dakota Columns. These columns eventually effected a linkup on the Yellowstone River on 9 June 1876. Thus, Terry and Gibbon worked in concert, while Crook's column attacking from the south had virtually no communication with the other two forces. While Gibbon's column had located the sought-after Indian encampment by the middle of May, he mysteriously failed to report this information to Terry, and failed to bring the enemy to battle.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the various columns spent the months of April and May searching for the hostile village, moving inexorably closer to a

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 322.

<sup>13</sup>On 24 March 1876, General Terry sent a telegram to his superior Major General Sheridan advising him that a trustworthy frontiersman reported that the hostile village consisted of no less than 2,000 lodges, with the warriors well supplied with ammunition. On 14 May 1876, Terry again sent Sheridan a telegram stating his belief that the village likely consisted of 1,500 lodges and that the Indians were likely preparing to make a stand. William O. Taylor, *With Custer on the Little Bighorn* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1996), 185.

<sup>14</sup>Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 79-80.

confrontation in present-day southern Montana that would culminate in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Crook again made the first significant contact with the enemy, this time, on the banks of the Rosebud Creek on 17 June 1876.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately for Crook, the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne had identified Crook's 1,300-man Wyoming Column and sent a war party, consisting of approximately 1,000 warriors, south to counter his continued northern movement. After a daylong battle, the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne checked Crook's advance, causing him to back-track south to his base camp on the Goose Creek, near present-day Sheridan, Wyoming. Crook would not again take to the field until after the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Although this engagement was not extremely significant, Crook's greatest fault lay in his failure to inform Terry and Gibbon of his battle, the aggressiveness of the Indians, and the large force of warriors encountered.<sup>16</sup> Although Sheridan's plan did not require communication between the separate columns, the anticipated enemy situation had changed, thus Crook might well have alerted his fellow commanders. Most commanders expected the Indians to avoid contact with the converging columns and to be capable of mustering at most 800 warriors. In the case of the Battle of the Rosebud, Crook encountered over 1,000 warriors more than twenty-five miles from the main village. Unfortunately, Crook only knew that he had faced over 1,000 warriors, but he was uncertain of the location of the village, believing it to be nearby the battlefield. Crook also likely believed that once he made contact with the Indians, the major village would disperse into many smaller encampments, as was the typical Indian tactic. Thus, conditions were not as expected, yet Crook only chose to inform his superior commander, failing

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<sup>15</sup>Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 255.

<sup>16</sup>Crook did report to Sheridan, but this information did not reach Terry until after the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 123-124.

to inform his fellow commanders of a change in the enemy situation, and thereby contributing to the subsequent disaster at the Little Bighorn.

### The Road to the Little Bighorn

While Crook was moving from the south, the combined Dakota and Montana columns, under the overall command of General Terry, were attempting to locate the Indian encampment. On 10 June 1876 Terry dispatched Major Marcus Reno, Custer's second-in-command, with six companies of the 7th Cavalry on a reconnaissance mission to the south, directed to scout along the Powder and Tongue Rivers and west to the Rosebud Creek.<sup>17</sup> On June 19, 1876, Reno returned from his scout with information on the Indian encampment. He had followed the trail of abandoned village sites as the Indian encampment moved southwest from the Tongue River toward the Rosebud Creek. Reno's scout determined that the enemy village was not on the Rosebud, as suspected by Terry, but instead had continued to move west and was likely along the Little Bighorn River. Reno also estimated that the village consisted of approximately 400 lodges.<sup>18</sup> Using the standard frontier calculation of two warriors per lodge, the village was believed to contain approximately 800 warriors, as most of the expedition's leaders expected. Unfortunately, the most recently occupied village site that Reno had identified was almost three weeks' old, having been occupied in early June. Unbeknownst to the military commanders, the summer roamers had begun to arrive in large numbers throughout the early part of June, nearly tripling the number of warriors that the Indians could field.

On the afternoon of 21 July 1876, General Terry held a planning conference with his senior commanders aboard the riverboat *Far West*, the column's supply boat.<sup>19</sup> Present at this

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>19</sup>John S. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 199-204.

conference were General Terry, Colonel Gibbon, Lieutenant Colonel Custer, and Major Brisbin, the commander of Gibbon's cavalry. During this meeting, Terry laid out his vision for the upcoming battle, giving orders to his subordinates. Custer, with the 7th Cavalry, was to move south up the Rosebud Creek, cut west to the headwaters of the Little Bighorn River, and then move north down the river to strike the village from the south.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Gibbon's column, with Terry, would move west along the Yellowstone River to its intersection with the Bighorn River. Gibbon would then move south up the Bighorn River to the mouth of the Little Bighorn. Based on time-distance calculations, Terry expected Gibbon's column to be at the mouth of the Little Bighorn on 26 June 1876. It is unclear from the historical record whether Gibbon's unit was to attack the village from the north or simply to establish a blocking position to intercept Indians fleeing from Custer's attack from the south.<sup>21</sup>

Almost since the last shots were fired in this battle, many have accused Custer of subsequently disobeying Terry's orders by deviating from the "ordered" route and attacking without the support of Gibbon's column. Although Terry delivered written orders to Custer prior to his departure from the main column on the morning of 22 June 1876, these orders gave Custer great discretion. Furthermore, the orders make only vague references to concerted action between Custer and Gibbon, stating that through their movements the Indian village "may be so nearly inclosed [*sic*] by the two columns that their escape will be impossible."<sup>22</sup> Whether Custer did or did not disobey orders exceeds the scope of this study, but what is important to note here is

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<sup>20</sup>Notations of "up" and "down" refer to the direction of flow for the various rivers and may confuse some readers not familiar with the river networks in southern Montana. The Little Bighorn River generally flows from south to north, emptying into the Bighorn River, just south of present-day Hardin, Montana. The Bighorn River also generally flows from south to north, eventually emptying into the Yellowstone River, near present-day Custer, Montana. As with the other watercourses south of the Yellowstone River, the Rosebud creek also flows from south to north, emptying into the Yellowstone River near present-day Rosebud, Montana. The Yellowstone River traverses the southern portion of Montana, generally flowing from west to east.

<sup>21</sup>Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 143.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

that none of the participants seem to have felt that either column (the Terry-Gibbon or the Custer Column) faced a grave risk if they encountered the Indian village without the support of the other force.<sup>23</sup>

Once the 7th Cavalry began its movement south, following the trace of the Rosebud Creek, Custer seems to have focused on locating the Indian village and striking it before it could disperse. The dispersion of the Indian village before it could be attacked appears to have been the predominant fear of most of the military leaders on this expedition, as this was the Indians most common defense.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Custer moved up the Rosebud Creek, following the trail of the Indian village, previously reported by Major Reno.

On the evening of 24 June 1876, Custer made his last camp along the Rosebud Creek in the vicinity of present-day Busby, Montana. Here, he decided to deviate from his orders and follow the trail of the Indian village west over the divide separating the Rosebud and Little Bighorn Valleys. The abandoned village sites were seen to be increasing in size as Custer's force began to close in on the village.<sup>25</sup> Custer informed his officers that he had decided to make a night march up to the Divide between the Rosebud and Little Bighorn Valleys. East of the Divide, he would conceal the command, allowing the men and horses to rest the following day, while the scouts reconnoitered to determine the exact disposition of the Indian village, thought to be on the banks of the Little Bighorn River.<sup>26</sup> Custer then planned to attack the village from the south on the morning of 26 June 1876, likely hoping for a repeat of his successful attack on the

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<sup>23</sup>Edward S. Godfrey, *Custer's Last Battle 1876* (Silverthorne, CO: Vistabooks, 1976), 42.

<sup>24</sup>Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 215.

<sup>25</sup>As Custer's force began to close in on the Indian encampment, scouts began to report that the abandoned village sites were growing in size. This was due to the arrival of the summer roamers who began to join the hostile camp in early June. Two highly respected scouts (Mitch Boyer and the Arikara Scout Bloody Knife) warned Custer that there were far too many Indians in the village for the 7th Cavalry to face, but were largely ignored.

<sup>26</sup>Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 221.

Cheyenne village of Black Kettle in November 1868.<sup>27</sup> This planned attack would have fulfilled General Terry's vision in which Custer's attack from the south would likely have driven the fleeing Indians north toward Gibbon's command that was still moving south up the Bighorn River toward the mouth of the Little Bighorn. Unfortunately for Custer and his command, as is often the case in battle, enemy actions played into the outcome of this battle.

### The Battle Begins

In the early morning hours of 25 June 1876, Custer's chief of scouts, Lieutenant Charles Varnum, and a small scouting party of Crow and Arikara Indian scouts climbed a hilltop lookout, subsequently known as the Crow's Nest.<sup>28</sup> From this perch, the Indian scouts identified signs of the Indian village on the banks of the Little Bighorn River.<sup>29</sup> Again, controversy arises, as accounts vary as to whether Custer's Indian scouts actually saw the village or simply identified indicators of a village (pony herd, smoke from cooking fires, etc.). Regardless of what the scouts actually saw, Varnum relayed the news of the sighting by courier to Custer, who immediately came forward to view the village firsthand. Unfortunately, by the time Custer arrived on the Crow's Nest, likely around 9:00 A.M., morning haze combined with smoke from cooking fires obscured the village approximately fifteen-miles to the west.<sup>30</sup>

With the general location of the village identified, it appeared as though Custer's plan of attack was on track. Unfortunately, Custer began to receive information that led him to believe

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<sup>27</sup>On 27 November 1868, Custer and the 7th Cavalry conducted a dawn attack on the sleeping village of Black Kettle on the Washita River in Indian Territory (northwest of present-day Elk City, Oklahoma). This successful attack, in which Custer's troops surrounded the sleeping village and attacked at sunrise, became the model for attacking an unsuspecting village.

<sup>28</sup>Walter Mason Camp, *Custer in '76: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight*, ed. Kenneth Hammer (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 60.

<sup>29</sup>Accounts widely vary as to the time of different occurrences. For the purposes of this study, the timetable for the battle is taken from John Gray's exhaustive study of time-distance relationships found in *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed*.

<sup>30</sup>Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 235-239.

that the Indians knew the location of his force.<sup>31</sup> Past encounters with the Indians had shown that once they identified a threat to their village, the village would disperse, leaving the Army no other option but to begin the search anew.

At this point, Custer made another fateful decision. He called his officers together and informed them that the command had been detected and that they must move west and attack the village immediately, to prevent the Indians from escaping. He ordered his subordinates to inspect their commands and prepare to move west.

At approximately noon on Sunday, 25 June 1876, the 7th Cavalry crossed the Divide, beginning the opening stages of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.<sup>32</sup> Just west of the Divide, Custer halted the command and gave orders for troop dispositions for the upcoming battle. As Custer was unsure of the exact location and disposition of the enemy, he arrayed his forces in a dispersed formation, designed to allow him to identify the enemy force and then maneuver his elements against the village. This formation would also allow the 7th Cavalry to strike the village from more than one direction simultaneously, another commonly believed “recipe for success” when attacking an Indian encampment.

Custer ordered Captain Benteen to take a battalion, consisting of Companies D, H, and K (approximately 125 men), to scout to the left (south), in order to observe the upper reaches of the Little Bighorn Valley.<sup>33</sup> This move was in keeping with Terry’s orders, which instructed Custer

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<sup>31</sup>Upon Custer’s arrival at the Crow’s Nest, Lieutenant Varnum informed Custer that his scouts had detected two Sioux scouting parties on the Divide. Varnum’s Crow scouts were certain that these Sioux had detected smoke from the cooking fires of the halted 7th Cavalry east of the Divide. One Crow scout, White Man Runs Him, reportedly argued with Custer as to whether the Sioux had identified the command. Upon Custer’s return to the column, Captain Tom Custer, George’s younger brother, informed him that a cavalry squad had backtracked along the column’s route of march to retrieve a box of rations which had come loose during the night movement up to the Divide. Upon cresting a ridgeline, the squad encountered two Indians attempting to open the box with their hatchets. The squad, led by Sergeant William Curtis, fired upon the Indians, who fled in the direction of the Little Bighorn. Gray, *Custer’s Last Campaign*, 239-241.

<sup>32</sup>Gray, *Custer’s Last Campaign*, 245.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 259.

to move, “feeling constantly to your left so as to preclude the possibility of the escape of the Indians to the south or southeast by passing around your left flank.”<sup>34</sup> This deployment also served to secure Custer’s southern flank, preventing any outlying Indian villages, further up the Little Bighorn, from surprising Custer’s main body from the south, as had nearly happened during the Battle of the Washita almost eight years before.<sup>35</sup>

Upon Benteen’s departure, Custer ordered his second-in-command Major Reno to form a battalion, consisting of Companies A, G, and M (approximately 140 men once augmented by elements of Varnum’s scouts).<sup>36</sup> Custer would retain command of the third and largest battalion consisting of Companies C, E, F, I, and L (approximately 225 men).<sup>37</sup> These dispositions left Company B, along with a detail under the command of Lieutenant Edward Mathey, to follow and secure the regiment’s mule pack trains (the entire force consisting of approximately 110 men).<sup>38</sup> Once the commanders had organized their ad hoc battalions, Custer ordered the main body, consisting of his battalion and Reno’s command, to move west toward a distant creek, then known as Ash Creek, but subsequently named Reno Creek. Company B and the regimental supply trains were to follow approximately twenty minutes behind the main body. As the mule train was slow and difficult to move, Custer must have known that this twenty-minute separation would increase over the necessary fifteen-mile movement to the Little Bighorn Valley. Thus,

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<sup>34</sup>Stewart, *Custer’s Luck*, 249.

<sup>35</sup>During the Battle of the Washita, Custer attacked the Southern Cheyenne Village of Black Kettle. Since Custer had moved his forces in after nightfall, without conducting a proper reconnaissance of the local area, he was unaware that at least seven other villages were camped in close proximity to Black Kettle’s village. Upon hearing the attack on Black Kettle’s village, Indian warriors massed on the high ground overlooking the battleground. Only through a brash demonstration of marching toward the subsequent camps was Custer able to extract the 7th Cavalry from this dire predicament.

<sup>36</sup>William A. Graham, *The Story of the Little Bighorn: Custer’s Last Fight* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 26.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*



with his forces divided and limited orders given to his subordinates, Custer moved his force toward the Indian village.

While traveling along the north side of Reno Creek, Custer ordered Reno's command to move along the south side of the creek. During the march down Reno Creek, Custer and Reno encountered a single "lone tepee," which was used as a burial lodge for a Sioux warrior, likely mortally wounded during the Battle of the Rosebud over a week before.<sup>39</sup> As the main body continued down Reno Creek, Custer's mistaken belief that the Indians were attempting to break camp and run away was continually reinforced.<sup>40</sup> Indicators, such as reports of small parties of warriors withdrawing as the cavalry continued to move west, and the huge dust cloud seen growing over the bluffs that screened the Little Bighorn Valley combined to convince Custer that if he did not attack swiftly, the elusive foe would escape.

Shortly after passing the lone tepee, Custer ordered Reno to continue west, cross the Little Bighorn River, and charge the southern end of the Indian village. Again, controversy arises, as many accuse Custer of abandoning Reno, as his orders, relayed by the Regimental Adjutant Lieutenant W. W. Cooke, stated "that Reno would be 'supported by the whole outfit.'"<sup>41</sup> Thus, Reno followed his commander's orders, expecting the entire regiment to reinforce his small battalion, adding the needed weight to his charge. Instead of following Reno's advance, Custer maneuvered his larger battalion along the eastern bank of the Little Bighorn, concealing his movement by traveling along the bluffs east of the river.

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<sup>39</sup>This lodge is referred to as the "Lone Tepee" or the "dead-warrior lodge" in most accounts of the battle. It is believed that the lodge contained the remains of a Sans Arc Warrior named Old She-Bear. David Humphreys Miller, *Custer's Fall: The Indian Side of the Story* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1957), 75.

<sup>40</sup>Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 273-275.

<sup>41</sup>W. A. Graham, *The Story of the Little Big Horn: Custer's Last Fight* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1926), 33.

As Reno's battalion charged down the valley, they encountered a large force of mounted warriors on the south side of the village. These warriors were riding their horses back and forth, stirring up dust to conceal the village and allowing their ponies to "get their second wind." Upon realizing that the Indians were moving south to meet his force, Reno ordered his battalion to halt and "Fight on Foot,"<sup>42</sup> establishing a dismounted skirmish line in the Valley, with the easternmost company's flank (Company G) generally anchored on the timber growing along the west side of the Little Bighorn River. Initially, Reno's force advanced toward the village on foot, firing at the massed Indian warriors attacking from the southern end of the village. This growing force of Indian warriors began maneuvering to turn Reno's left flank, which extended out into the valley floor.<sup>43</sup> The Indian flanking maneuver appears to have been aimed at stampeding Reno's held horses, which were initially deployed to the rear of the skirmish line, in accordance with the standard tactics of the day.<sup>44</sup> As a result of this threat to the "held horses," the mounts were moved to the east, into the protection of the timber growing alongside the river. Meanwhile the Indian force arrayed against Reno's battalion was growing in number, as more warriors rallied to defend the southern end of the camp, resulting in as many as 900 warriors facing Reno's Command of 140 troopers.. It was not long before Reno's entire command withdrew to the cover of the timber, likely only holding its position on the valley floor for approximately fifteen minutes.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Emory Upton, *Cavalry Tactics: United States Army, Assimilated to the Tactics of Infantry and Artillery* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1874), 264.

<sup>43</sup>Gregory F. Michno, *Lakota Noon: The Indian Narrative of Custer's Defeat* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 197), 56-57.

<sup>44</sup>When a Cavalry unit was ordered to fight on foot, the men would count off by "fours" (the smallest unit within the organization, roughly equivalent to the modern-day squad), with the fourth man taking his three companions' horses, and leading them to the rear. This allowed the three dismounted cavalrymen on the skirmish line to concentrate on firing their weapons vice controlling their mounts. Upton, *Cavalry Tactics*, 253.

<sup>45</sup>Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 290.

While Reno's Command was drawing the warriors south, Custer moved his larger battalion along the bluffs east of the Little Bighorn River, with a likely mission of striking the northern end of the village. As previously stated, the standard practice was to hit a village in numerous locations, throwing the warriors off balance, and precipitating a rout of the Indian force. Also, from the bluffs east of the river, Custer observed the Indian village and likely saw that most of the non-combatants were fleeing north and the northern end of the village was largely unprotected.<sup>46</sup>

As Custer continued his movement north, Reno's beleaguered command was virtually surrounded in the timber. As the situation in the timber became increasingly untenable, Reno decided to withdraw his command from the valley floor and seek safety in the high ground east of the Little Bighorn River. Reno ordered the withdrawal of his forces, a maneuver that he subsequently referred to as a "charge." Unfortunately, this retreat or "charge" was poorly planned, inadequately commanded, and executed by a terrified command. Thus, Reno's action in the valley left forty dead cavalymen (almost one-third of Reno's force) laying along the banks of the Little Bighorn River.<sup>47</sup>

Reno's retreat from the valley allowed the Indians concentrated on the southern side of the village to ride north against a newly identified threat, the battalion under the personal command of Lieutenant Colonel Custer. Along his route of march, Custer had sent two messages back to the pack trains and Benteen's command to quickly move up and reinforce him.<sup>48</sup> These messages would be sent in vain, as the Indians were able to concentrate on Custer's command more quickly than his own forces could come to his aid. Again, controversy rears its ugly head,

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<sup>46</sup>Many scholars have speculated that Custer was likely attempting to capture the Indian noncombatants in an effort to subdue the warriors. One must remember that the overall objective was to force the Indians to the reservation. If Custer could capture the village and the noncombatants, he could likely negotiate with the warriors for their surrender.

<sup>47</sup>Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 294.

<sup>48</sup>Stewart, *Custer's Luck*, 238-240.

as many advocates of Custer cast dispersions upon his subordinates for failing their commander in his hour of greatest need, but as with the previously mentioned controversies, these accusations exceed the scope of this study.

As Custer's forces attempted to maneuver against the northern end of the village, the Indian warriors blocked his attack in the vicinity of a river-crossing site near the intersection of Medicine Tail Coulee and the Little Bighorn River. Exactly how Custer's battalion was destroyed is a matter of speculation, since all of the white participants of this battle were killed, with only the Indian warriors remaining to tell the saga of "Custer's Last Stand."

The existing Indian accounts are quite confusing due to a multitude of reasons. First, the Indians do not have a common measure of time that is easily understood by modern researchers. Secondly, the Indians did not develop a chronological history of the battle, but instead collected various warrior accounts, which were combined to develop the oral tribal history. Finally, many historians consider the Indian accounts suspect, since many stories were told after the Indians surrendered to the whites, with participants fearing retribution from an angry white society. All of these reasons, combined with the inherent difficulties of translating the Indian accounts from their native language to English, tend to complicate the Indian testimony, leaving a very disjointed and confusing explanation of exactly what happened to Custer's battalion. Thus, the question of exactly how Custer's battalion was destroyed that June day in 1876 will likely remain a matter of conjecture forever.

What is certain is that the five companies of the 7th Cavalry (Companies C, E, F, I, and L) moved north to a ridge that is today known as Custer or Battle Ridge. On this prominence, or in the general vicinity, the remains of approximately 210 cavalymen were found on 27 June 1876.<sup>49</sup> The Sioux and Northern Cheyenne were able to mass over 1,000 warriors against

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<sup>49</sup>Gray, *Centennial Campaign*, 294.

Custer's command and they quickly overwhelmed the beleaguered defenders, killing every member of the command. How it occurred is not as important as that it occurred.

During the destruction of Custer's command, members of Reno's command attempted to go to the aid of their commander. With the sound of firing evident to the north, Captain Thomas Weir led his Company D towards the "sound of the guns" and out of the defensive perimeter that Reno had established on the bluffs east of the Little Bighorn River.<sup>50</sup> Eventually, other elements of Reno's command followed Company D to a ridgeline approximately a mile north of the defensive position, taking position on a high promontory subsequently known as Weir Point. From this observation post, elements of Reno's command likely witnessed the end of the tragic battle, without fully understanding the significance of what they were observing. Once the Indians had overwhelmed Custer's force, they quickly moved south to force Reno's command back into its defensive perimeter.

### The Battle Ends

For the remainder of the evening of 25 June 1876, the Indian warriors surrounded Reno's defensive perimeter, placing a heavy volume of fire on the soldiers. As night fell, the majority of the Indians returned to the village, leaving a small force to ensure that the soldiers did not withdraw. At this time, withdrawal would have been impossible, as Reno had to consider the necessity of carrying out his wounded soldiers. Thus, the surviving members of the 7th Cavalry spent a fitful night on a hilltop east of the Little Bighorn, preparing defensive positions that they were certain to need the following day, when the Sioux and Cheyenne would undoubtedly return.

Throughout the day of 26 June 1876, Indian warriors held the remnants of the 7th Cavalry in check on Reno Hill. Several times throughout the day, small groups of soldiers left

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<sup>50</sup>Graham, *The Story of the Little Bighorn*, 63-65.

the safety of the hilltop defenses to fill canteens from the river at the base of the bluffs.<sup>51</sup> Also, throughout the day, the dismounted cavalymen made several charges to push back Indian encroachment on their positions. At the end of the day, the Indians broke camp and moved south along the Little Bighorn Valley. Warriors in the trail of the giant procession were seen lighting the prairie grass on fire, to discourage pursuit by cavalry forces.

On the morning of 27 June 1876, survivors on Reno Hill observed a US Army force moving south down the Little Bighorn Valley. Relief had come at last to the survivors of the 7th Cavalry, as the column under command of General Terry arrived at the recently abandoned village site. With the arrival of Terry's forces (primarily composed of Gibbon's Montana Column), came the shocking revelation that Custer's Battalion had been killed to the man on a ridgeline approximately three miles north of their defensive site. Throughout their time on Reno Hill, the surviving members of the 7th Cavalry had debated what had happened to Custer.<sup>52</sup> Many thought that Custer had abandoned Reno and Benteen, while others believed that the Indians had pushed Custer's forces north, where they likely joined forces with the Terry-Gibbon Column. No one seemed to believe that Custer, the hero of the Civil War, a man notorious for his "Custer's Luck," could possibly have suffered such a grave defeat.

### Conclusion

With the end of this historic battle came a great many questions and controversies. More important than questions and controversies, this defeat brought about a resurgence of national

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<sup>51</sup>In recognition of the selfless heroism displayed by these "water carriers," nineteen soldiers were later awarded the Medal of Honor. An additional four soldiers also earned this prestigious award for other acts of heroism during this battle. This is the largest number of recipients of this award ever for a single engagement. Melbourne C. Chandler, *Of Gary Owen in Glory: The History of the Seventh United States Cavalry* (Annandale, VA: The Turnpike Press, Inc., 1960), 397.

<sup>52</sup>Graham, *The Story of the Little Bighorn*, 76.

will. Thus, Custer's defeat became the impetus for stirring the nation to ultimate victory over the Plains Tribes. The primary question remains, How could this occur?

One must understand the Victory Disease and its symptoms to truly answer this question. In Chapter 4, an in-depth analysis of the symptoms of the Victory Disease will illustrate how arrogance, complacency, and the habit of using established patterns combined, leading to the defeat of the 7th Cavalry on the banks of the Little Bighorn River. In essence, an arrogant feeling of invincibility combined with a commonly held belief that the Indians would be unable to stand against a disciplined force of cavalry. Added to these two initial symptoms was the use of an established pattern on the part of Custer's Cavalry, while his Indian foes deviated from their normal reaction. These symptoms thus grew into a terminal case of the Victory Disease.

After presenting the basics of the Centennial Campaign of 1876 and the actions of the 7th Cavalry during the Battle of the Little Bighorn, this paper now transitions to an examination of a more recent example of the Victory Disease. With the turning of a page, this paper leaps ahead through over 100 years, to examine an example of the Victory Disease that occurred during the late twentieth century.

## CHAPTER 3

### TASK FORCE RANGER IN MOGADISHU

It is easy to assume that although the effects of the Victory Disease may have contributed to the defeat of the 7th Cavalry during the Battle of the Little Bighorn, national and military leaders are today incapable of falling prey to the symptoms of this disease. The 1993 deployment of TF Ranger to the war-torn African nation of Somalia refutes this belief that current leaders have learned and therefore are vaccinated to the effect of the Victory Disease. In this example, the symptoms are most prevalent at the strategic and operational levels of war, with some indication that leaders at the tactical level also suffered the effects of this debilitating disease.

As with the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the reader must first understand the overall operation in Somalia and how a battle occurred in early October 1993. Armed with this understanding of the operation, further analysis of the symptoms of the Victory Disease will illustrate how this phenomenon contributed to the failed US policy in Somalia, and how leaders are still susceptible to the effects of this disease.

#### Descent into Anarchy

The Somali Republic was formed in July 1960, by a post-colonial merger of the former British and Italian Somalilands.<sup>1</sup> From its outset, this nation on the eastern coast of Africa was beset by problems. Although unlike many former colonial holdings within Africa, Somali boundaries were drawn to allow for a homogenous population, still Somali society was divided along social and occupational lines, between urban and rural populations, and most significantly as a result of various clans within the population.<sup>2</sup> The typical Somali viewed himself as a

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<sup>1</sup>*The United Nations and Somalia 1992-1996*, The United Nations Blue Book Series, vol. 8 (New York: The United Nations Department of Public Information, 1996), 9.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.



member of his particular clan first, as opposed to as a Somali, thus limiting the strength of Somali nationalism by the divisive impact of these clans within the society.

The early attempts by the Somalis to forge a nation were torn asunder with the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Sharma'arke in October 1969.<sup>3</sup> This move set the stage for a military coup, which ended with the installment of General Mohamed Siad Barre, who would nominally rule Somalia for over twenty years. Throughout the reign of Siad Barre, Somalia continued its descent into chaos. The 1977/78 failed war with Ethiopia highlighted the weakness of Siad Barre's government, and brought a resurgence of clan-based loyalties to the forefront.<sup>4</sup> Following Somalia's defeat in the war against Ethiopia in 1978, Siad Barre survived an attempted coup, illustrating the tenuous hold that he had on the Somali government. Along with this attempted coup came the formation of opposition groups, mostly clan-based and dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Siad Barre regime. From the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, these clan-based difficulties began to simmer, reaching the boiling point in the late 1980s.

By 1988, Siad Barre's government faced a full-blown civil war, brought about primarily as a result of interclan rivalries and hatred. Clan-based opposition groups began armed revolt against the Siad Barre regime, seizing large portions of the country and threatening Mogadishu itself. This civil war "uprooted half a million people, devastated the economy and sharply reduced food production."<sup>5</sup> Since only a small portion of Somali territory is capable of supporting food production, this disruption of food production due to the civil war was the genesis of the famine that struck Somalia in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

In January 1991, after almost three years of bloody civil war, Siad Barre fled Mogadishu, yielding control of Somalia to various clans and factions.<sup>6</sup> With the dissolution of the Somali national army, large quantities of heavy weapons, from machine guns to tanks, to artillery pieces, fell into the hands of the clans, increasing their lethality in future battles. Most importantly, the collapse of the central government ushered in an era of lawless anarchy, in which various clan-based opposition movements vied for control of key regions and cities. The real loser of this civil war was not Siad Barre, but the Somali people, who were suffering through an intense famine, with over 1.5 million people in desperate need of external aid to stave off the effects of starvation.<sup>7</sup>

The Hawiya clan initially formed the United Somali Congress (USC), but after several years of civil war, intraclan rivalries began to develop. The capital city of Mogadishu was a prize contested by the two primary subdivisions of the Hawiya clan, the Habr Gedir subclan under the control of General Mohamed Farah Aidid, and the Abgal subclan under the control of Mr. Ali Mahdi Mohamed.<sup>8</sup> Aidid's forces controlled southern Mogadishu, while northern Mogadishu remained in the control of forces loyal to Ali Mahdi. This contest for Mogadishu would become one of the key components in the chaos that surrounded Somalia in the early 1990s.

As a result of the civil war and the resulting famine, a need existed for an external body to assist the Somali people in emerging from this chaos. This external body would need to broker a peace, and then be capable of monitoring or enforcing the peace. Meanwhile, this external body had to be capable of bring desperately needed relief to the local populace, dying of starvation. The United Nations (UN) seemed to be the perfect organization to fill this void.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 12.

### Enter The United Nations

The UN had maintained a presence in Somalia since the late 1970s, focusing primarily on refugee management and distribution of relief supplies and food.<sup>9</sup> Due to the civil war and interclan fighting, these services had been disrupted on several occasions, but still UN officials sought to reduce the suffering of the Somali population. By early 1992, in conjunction with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Council of the League of Arab States, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) urged all parties of the conflict to cease hostilities.<sup>10</sup> At this time, the UN also imposed an arms embargo on Somalia, to prevent the clans from gaining additional weapons and expanding the conflict.<sup>11</sup>

### United Nations Operations in Somalia--UNOSOM I

On 3 March 1992 Aidid and Ali Mahdi signed a UN-brokered cease-fire agreement and consented to UN monitoring of this agreement.<sup>12</sup> While fighting continued throughout the rest of Somalia, major fighting ended for a period in Mogadishu. Over the next several months, the UN began the deployment of military observers and a small (500 man) security force under the auspices of the United Nations Operations in Somalia (commonly referred to as UNOSOM I). Pakistan contributed these initial UNOSOM I forces, with Pakistani Brigadier General Imtiaz Shaheen serving as the Chief Military Observer.<sup>13</sup> The intended role of the military observers was to monitor the cease-fire agreement between the Habr Gedir and Abgal subclans, while the security force was to provide protection for humanitarian operations and the unarmed observer

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 26-27.

force. Perhaps the greatest weakness of UNOSOM I, besides its inadequate military force, was its single focus on Mogadishu, neglecting the remainder of the war-torn nation.

By November 1992, open hostilities existed between UNOSOM I forces and major clans within Mogadishu, including the recently formed Somali National Alliance (SNA), which was based primarily on Aidid's Habr Gedir clan. With the Somali initiation of hostilities, it became clear that UNOSOM I would be unable to bring stability to Mogadishu, not to mention the rest of Somalia. This inability of UNOSOM I to accomplish its mission led the UN to consider more forceful options as 1992 drew to a close.

#### Unified Task Force (UNITAF)

In December 1992, following the failure of UNOSOM I, the UNSC requested that the US form and lead a Unified Task Force (UNITAF), with the primary mission of bringing international control to the war-torn region. The formation of UNITAF was a significant shift as it took control away from the UN and placed it fully in the hands of the US, to act in the stead of the UN.<sup>14</sup> UNITAF would be the first invocation of Chapter VII of the Charter of the UN to deal with a conflict contained within a single state's borders.<sup>15</sup> Under Chapter VII, UN forces were authorized to engage in peace enforcement, using military force to restore peace and stability to the anarchy that was Somalia. UNITAF eventually grew to over 38,000 personnel, with the US providing the core of these forces with its nearly 28,000-man commitment (centered primarily around a Marine Expeditionary Force [MEF]).<sup>16</sup> The stated mission of UNITAF was to resolve the immediate security problems within Somalia. There was a great deal of discussion within the UNSC on the issue of disarming the clans and other warring factions, but the UNSC never

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>16</sup>Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1995), 17.

expanded the UNITAF charter to include disarmament of the clans, thus the US-led force was only required to enforce a tenuous peace.<sup>17</sup> With this mission, UNITAF rapidly began deployment to the war-torn country.

Unlike UNOSOM I, UNITAF quickly expanded its influence throughout Somalia, controlling nine key towns within three weeks of arriving in Somalia.<sup>18</sup> UNITAF elements secured important transportation facilities and food distribution centers and began providing security to relief convoys, delivering critically needed food, and quickly ending the famine by late January 1993. Thus, UNITAF with its peace enforcement charter and significant force structure was able to threaten the use of force and gain compliance from the warring clans, bringing relative peace to the region. By March 1993, the resounding success of UNITAF paved the way for a subsequent UN-led operation that would carry on the Chapter VII functions of UNITAF. For the first time in over ten years, the conditions were set for a restoration of peace in Somalia, but the clans still had great potential to control the region.

#### United Nations Operations in Somalia--UNOSOM II

In yet another historic step, the UNSC established UNOSOM II, the first ever UN-led peace enforcement operation authorized under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>19</sup> UNOSOM II was given the mission of building on the success of UNITAF by continuing to establish a secure environment throughout Somalia. In addition to the standard security tasks, UNOSOM II would actually be given the additional tasks of disarming the factions and controlling all heavy weapons previously belonging to the clans.

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<sup>17</sup>*The United Nations and Somalia*, 32.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

UNOSOM II initially consisted of approximately 28,000 troops under the command of Turkish Lieutenant General Cevik Bir.<sup>20</sup> The US commitment to UNOSOM II consisted of logistics units remaining in Somalia from the previous UNITAF mission, but expanded to include an air-mobile infantry task force (from the US 10th Mountain Division), serving as the mission's Quick Reaction Force (QRF). Also, the US stationed a Joint Task Force (JTF) off the Somali coast, but maintained that force under US control. This JTF was positioned off the coast as a visible reminder of the US commitment to back this UN-led operation. Thus, like its UNITAF predecessor, UNOSOM II provided a credible deterrent to a resurgence of violence in Somalia.

Initially, UNOSOM II seemed well capable of expanding on the successes won by UNITAF, but by early June 1993, UNOSOM II forces found themselves in increasingly hostile contact with the local clans. Much of the hostilities seem to have resulted from the task to disarm the clans, which did not appeal to the clan leaders. The most extreme incident occurred on 5 June 1993, when elements of Aidid's SNA ambushed a UNOSOM II convoy and attacked a unit guarding a food distribution center, resulting in the deaths of twenty-four Pakistani peacekeepers, and the wounding of an additional fifty-six Pakistani troops.<sup>21</sup> These attacks signaled the beginning of a new era of hostilities that would test the resolve of both the UN and the US.

Based on these significant attacks against the UN forces in Mogadishu, the UNSC authorized UNOSOM II to begin attempting to capture those responsible for attacks against UN forces. Further incidents between UNOSOM II forces and Aidid's SNA continued to occur, throughout the summer. During this period, UN forces also began to take a more aggressive stance, resulting in a helicopter gunship attack on a clan meeting on 12 July 1993. This attack resulted in significant casualties for Aidid's Habr Gedir clan.<sup>22</sup> By the end of September,

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>22</sup>On the morning of 12 July 1993, US helicopter gunships of the QRF attacked the house of Abdi Hassan Awale (also known as Qeybdid). UN intelligence had received reports that this was the site of a

UNOSOM II would suffer additional casualties attempting to enforce peace in a lawless Mogadishu. As casualties mounted, the UN began to take greater interest in the capture of the clan leaders responsible for these attacks. At the top of the list was Mohamed Farah Aidid.

From a US standpoint, perhaps the most significant attack occurred on 8 August 1993, when four US Army military policemen were killed when a remotely detonated mine blew up their vehicle.<sup>23</sup> A similar incident occurred of 22 August, wounding an additional seven US soldiers. These incidents were the turning point for the newly installed Clinton administration, causing the US to shift to the offensive. Since the initial attacks in June, retired US Admiral Jonathon Howe, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Somalia, had been pressuring the Clinton administration for special operations forces (SOF) capable of capturing enemy clan leaders.<sup>24</sup> It seemed as though the impetus for commitment of these needed forces had finally occurred.

#### TF Ranger Arrives in Mogadishu

As a response to the August attacks on US forces, the Clinton administration ordered the deployment of TF Ranger to Mogadishu, for Operation Gothic Serpent. During the preceding months, the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) had sent two different reconnaissance parties to Mogadishu to determine the feasibility of capturing Aidid and to gain an initial intelligence assessment.<sup>25</sup> The initial reconnaissance party reported that the capture of Aidid was possible, due to his very public movements. However by July, Aidid had significantly curtailed

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high-level meeting of leaders of the Habr Gedir clan. This attack resulted in between twenty and seventy-five Somalis killed. Mark Bowden, *Blackhawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999), 72-74 and 94-95.

<sup>23</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 95.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>25</sup>MG (Ret) William Garrison, interview by author, tape recording, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 21 January 2003.

his public appearances due to his increasingly hostile stance toward the UN, thus the likelihood of capturing him became quite remote. Despite poor chances of success, TF Ranger, a 450-man elite unit, commanded by US Army Major General (MG) William Garrison, arrived in Mogadishu in late August 1993.

The task force was to work outside of the normal UN command structure. Although Admiral Howe had relentlessly lobbied for the commitment of TF Ranger, the UN force commander had absolutely no control over this force, with TF Ranger only coordinating its operations with the UN Deputy Force Commander, US Army MG Thomas Montgomery.<sup>26</sup> This coordination was essential to ensure that UN Forces did not stumble into a TF Ranger raid, and to ensure that TF Ranger would have needed support from the UN QRF, in the event that the elite troops encountered significant enemy resistance. Therefore, while TF Ranger was essentially doing the bidding of the UN, it did not report to nor receive orders from the UN chain of command.

The TF Ranger plan was broken down into three distinct phases.<sup>27</sup> Phase I was the preparation phase, in which the elite soldiers of TF Ranger would acclimate, familiarize themselves with the local area, and train with elements of the QRF to ensure interoperability between the two forces. Phase II was devoted to capturing Aidid. MG Garrison planned to devote seven days to this phase, as he believed that if Aidid were not captured in the first week, he would not be. Phase III of the operation involved “taking down” Aidid’s infrastructure, in order to prevent him from prosecuting his war against UNOSOM II.

After spending their initial week in Somalia, TF Ranger was ready to transition to Phase II of the operation, actively seeking to accomplish its primary mission, the capture of General Mohamed Farah Aidid. From their base at the Mogadishu Airport, the Task Force deployed for

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.



its first mission. On 30 August elements of TF Ranger conducted a heliborne-assault to raid the Lig Lagato compound, the suspected origin of a mortar attack on the Task Force's base camp the previous day.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, the intelligence available to TF Ranger was faulty at best, and this operation resulted in the elite forces raiding a UN compound and detaining nine UN employees. This was an inauspicious start for the task force and caused many in Washington to question if TF Ranger could possibly accomplish their assigned mission, which could only be likened to trying to find a specific needle hiding in a stack of needles.

Beginning with the Lig Lagato Raid of 30 August, TF Ranger conducted an additional five raids throughout the month of September 1993. As anticipated, MG Garrison quickly determined that actually capturing Aidid, with the limited intelligence that TF Ranger developed and received, would be highly improbable; therefore, he decided to transition to Phase III, dismantling Aidid's infrastructure and chain of command. On 21 September 1993, the task force conducted an extremely successful mission, seizing Osman Atto, Aidid's chief financier and a senior member of the Habr Gedir clan.<sup>29</sup> Thus, operations began to focus on capturing Aidid's top lieutenants, referred to as "Tier One" personalities.

The task force's initial six missions established observable patterns, with each conducted in a similar fashion. These missions consisted of several elements working in close coordination. Typically these elements would be inserted into the objective area by helicopter, using a technique known as "fast roping."<sup>30</sup> The initial force inserted would be the ground assault force,

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<sup>28</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Intelligence surfaced regarding the movement of this member of Aidid's inner circle. Upon identifying the vehicle convoy transporting Atto through the streets of Mogadishu, members of the Task Force conducted a daylight assault on the moving convoy, capturing Atto. Atto was imprisoned with other SNA leaders on Camia Island, off the southern port city of Kismayo. Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 96.

<sup>30</sup>"Fast Roping" is a technique similar to standard rappelling, and is a very rapid way to descend from a helicopter hovering 25-to-100 feet above the ground. In fast roping a large diameter rope is dropped from the hovering helicopter. Soldiers, wearing heavy leather gloves, then jump out of the helicopter, onto the rope, and slide down the rope, much like sliding down a fireman's pole.

consisting of small teams of SOF, to clear the objective and capture the assigned target personnel. Additional forces would establish blocking positions at key intersections to isolate the objective.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the mission, helicopters would remain overhead to provide support in the event of significant enemy resistance.

In an effort to mislead the enemy as to the time and place of operations, MG Garrison ordered the elements of Task Force Ranger to conduct “signature flights.” These signature flights consisted of a group of helicopters loaded with fully armed soldiers of TF Ranger, departing the airfield at varying times, to consistently keep Aidid’s forces off guard.<sup>32</sup> The Task Force also conducted similar operations using ground convoys. Thus, MG Garrison did everything in his power to avoid becoming predictable and giving the enemy the opportunity to seize the initiative.

### The Battle of the Black Sea

As the Task Force continued its effort to dismantle Aidid’s infrastructure, the afternoon of 3 October 1993 presented a golden opportunity. Intelligence reports from a Somali spy indicated that senior members of Aidid’s Habr Gedir clan planned to meet that afternoon in the Bakara Market region of South Mogadishu.<sup>33</sup> As intelligence confirmed the time and place of the meeting, TF Ranger leaders and planners developed a plan to conduct a raid on the meeting place near Mogadishu’s Olympic Hotel. This raid would subsequently become known as the Battle of the Black Sea.

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<sup>31</sup>The blocking positions were generally established by elements of Company B, 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment.

<sup>32</sup>Lawrence Casper, *Falcon Brigade: Combat and Command in Somalia and Haiti* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2001), 37.

<sup>33</sup> The Bakara Market was located in the heart of Aidid’s stronghold. TF Ranger Commander, MG Garrison, knew that his forces had approximately thirty minutes in this part of the city before they would become decisively engaged. MG (Ret) William Garrison, interview by author, tape recording, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 21 January 2003.

As with the previous missions, helicopters would deliver the various troops their specified locations around the objective; depositing the ground assault force in close proximity to the target building, and then dropping the Rangers into blocking positions to isolate the building. Another element of the plan was a ground convoy, consisting of nine High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) and three five-ton trucks, to extract the “precious cargo,” once seized.<sup>34</sup> This same ground convoy would then extract the ground forces. With the planning complete, last-minute checks were made, and the ground force loaded the helicopters.

At 3:30 P.M., 16 helicopters of Task Force Ranger lifted off from the airport, carrying approximately 100 heavily armed soldiers into the battle.<sup>35</sup> The flight departed the airfield, traveling south over the Indian Ocean, and then turned back inland, heading toward the Bakara Market region. At approximately 3:40 P.M., the lead helicopters of TF Ranger began their hover around the target building, allowing the ground assault element to fast rope to the ground and begin the assault. As the Rangers were inserted to their blocking positions, a young Ranger, Private First Class (PFC) Todd Blackburn, fell while attempting to fast rope in, suffering a nearly seventy-foot fall to the Somali street below, leaving him seriously injured and in need of immediate evacuation and medical support.<sup>36</sup> This would be the first of many things to go wrong that day.

As the Rangers established their blocking positions and cared for the injured Blackburn, the ground assault force had been clearing the target building. In short order, effective Somali resistance in the target building was neutralized and the members of the ground assault force had begun rounding up the precious cargo. As the soldiers of TF Ranger went about their business,

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<sup>34</sup>In the parlance of TF Ranger, “precious cargo,” or PC, referred to the captured Somali clan leaders.

<sup>35</sup>Kent DeLong and Steven Tuckey, *Mogadishu! Heroism and Tragedy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994), xi.

<sup>36</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 16.

armed Somalis began to converge on the area, and incoming hostile fire increased drastically. Meanwhile, the ground convoy arrived in the area and began loading the “precious cargo,” while steps were being taken to evacuate PFC Blackburn.<sup>37</sup> Thus, with the exception of Blackburn’s injury, the operation was going well, considering that US forces were in the heart of Aidid’s stronghold under heavy Somali fire.

Since inserting the ground force, the Task Force’s helicopters were orbiting the objective area, providing necessary fire support for the ground forces, and doing their best to keep the armed Somalis from closing in on the Ranger blocking positions. Just as the ground forces were preparing for extraction, a Somali-fired rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) struck the tail rotor of the MH60 Blackhawk (radio callsign *Super Six One*) piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Cliff Wolcott.<sup>38</sup> The aircraft crashed approximately four blocks northeast of the target building, going in hard and killing both pilots and injuring several soldiers in the cargo compartment of the aircraft. The worst-case scenario had just occurred, TF Ranger had a helicopter down in the very heart of Aidid’s South Mogadishu stronghold.

The downed Blackhawk began to force TF Ranger to react to the Somalis. Up until this point, the elements of TF Ranger were imposing their will upon the enemy, but with the loss of *Super Six One*, the Somalis had begun to seize the initiative. The initial response was to move elements of the northeast blocking position, under Ranger Lieutenant Tom DiTomaso, to secure the crash site.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, an MH6 “Little Bird” light helicopter (radio callsign *Star Four One*) landed near the crash site and evacuated the two most seriously wounded soldiers from the crash site, leaving the remaining soldiers, now reinforced by DiTomaso’s Rangers to secure the

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<sup>37</sup>Three HMMWVs from the ground convoy broke off the main convoy to evacuate PFC Blackburn. This small evacuation convoy ran the gauntlet of Somali fire, fighting their way back to the Ranger compound at the airfield. On this treacherous journey, TF Ranger lost its first soldier, Sergeant Dominick Pilla.

<sup>38</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 79.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 84-85.

crash site and wait for help.<sup>40</sup> Additional assistance came as the combat search and rescue (CSAR) force was inserted via fast rope into the crash site, adding another fourteen soldiers to secure the perimeter.<sup>41</sup> While the crash site was secure, its location approximately four blocks from the target building would complicate the extraction, as would the need to recover the remains of the pilots which were pinned in the wreckage.

While forces were moving to secure the downed helicopter, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Danny McKnight, the commander of the wheeled ground convoy, was preparing to extract the precious cargo and forces near the target building. Casualties were mounting, with many soldiers wounded due to the heavy volume of Somali fire. The situation was chaotic, with some elements of the initial ground force loading onto the vehicles of the ground convoy, while other members moved on foot to the crash site. All the while, leaders attempted to account for each individual soldier, to ensure that once the force extracted, no one would be left behind. The ground convoy was to move to the Wolcott crash site for linkup with all elements of the force and conduct final extraction from that site.

Just as LTC McKnight began to move the ground convoy toward the Wolcott crash site, Somali gunners found their mark on another MH60 Blackhawk, hitting *Super Six Four*, piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Mike Durant.<sup>42</sup> While initially assessing the damage to his aircraft, Durant lost control, crash landing his helicopter approximately eight blocks south of the target building. The situation had just gone from bad to worse, with the nearly 150 men of TF Ranger spread out over an area encompassing approximately one square mile of urban terrain, surrounded by

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<sup>40</sup>DeLong and Tuckey, *Mogadishu!*, 16.

<sup>41</sup>While inserting the CSAR Team, MH60 *Super Six Eight*, piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Dan Jollata was hit while the team was fast roping into the crash site. Jollata held his aircraft steady, under intense ground fire until all the members of the CSAR Team made it safely to the ground. Jollata then limped his crippled aircraft back to the airfield, barely clearing the perimeter fence before making a crash landing.

<sup>42</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 102-103.

hundreds of armed Somalis. The US forces were concentrated in the vicinity of the target building and the Wolcott crash site, with only the four-man crew of *Super Six Four* isolated and far from friendly forces.

The focus of the operation shifted once again, now to the need to secure *Super Six Four*. In an effort to secure the crash site, two TF Ranger snipers, Master Sergeant (MSG) Gary Gordon and Sergeant First Class (SFC) Randy Shughart volunteered to insert from MH60 *Super Six Two*.<sup>43</sup> MSG Gordon and SFC Shughart assessed the wreckage and the casualties, attempting to fend off the growing Somali mobs. In short order the crash site was overrun, with Durant the sole survivor.<sup>44</sup> While Gordon and Shughart were attempting to secure the crash site, Rangers from the airfield mounted a hasty rescue convoy, which was forced to return to the base due to heavy Somali fire and significant casualties.<sup>45</sup>

The extraction plan once again shifted. As a result of the loss of *Super Six Four*, the consolidation point for ground forces remained the Wolcott crash site, where linkup would be effected with the ground convoy. From this point, all of the soldiers would load aboard the vehicles of the ground convoy, and then the entire force would move to the Durant crash site. The majority of the ground assault force and the Rangers from the blocking position were moving on foot toward the Wolcott crash site, when Durant's *Super Six Four* was shot down. LTC McKnight, with the wheeled ground convoy attempted to negotiate the maze of Somali streets to link up with the forces at the Wolcott crash site. Due to barricaded streets, confusing directions, and heavy enemy fire, the ground convoy never made it to the Wolcott crash site. In light of

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<sup>43</sup>For this act of heroism, MSG Gordon and SFC Shughart were awarded the nation's highest military award, the Medal of Honor. They were the first recipients of this prestigious award since the end of the Vietnam War.

<sup>44</sup>Durant was captured by the Somalis, suffering an eleven-day captivity. Durant had suffered a broken back and leg during the crash and numerous injuries due to beatings that he received at the time of his capture.

<sup>45</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 160-164.

significant casualties (approximately 50% of the force), LTC McKnight ordered the ground convoy to return to the airfield, running the gauntlet of Somali fire to reach safety.<sup>46</sup>

It was now early evening, and the situation around the Wolcott crash site was precarious. The CSAR Team and DiTomasso's Rangers had secured the crash site, but were under heavy fire and suffering significant casualties. Meanwhile, the other ground forces moving toward the crash site on foot had been pinned down by heavy Somali fire, establishing three separate strong points approximately a block apart.<sup>47</sup> Despite the desire to consolidate these forces, heavy Somali fire kept them pinned down and unable to link up with one another or the forces at the Wolcott crash site.

Throughout the late afternoon, MG Garrison and elements of the TF Ranger staff had been trying to organize a relief convoy consisting of a company from the 10th Mountain Division, the UNOSOM II QRF.<sup>48</sup> By early evening, this force, consisting of twelve HMMWVs and nine 2.5-ton trucks, attempted to fight their way to the Durant crash site, but were turned back by intense Somali fire.<sup>49</sup> Having failed with this initial attempt, the planners set about forming a multinational relief force based around LTC Bill David's 2-14 Infantry, consisting of numerous HMMWVs and several 2.5-ton trucks, augmented by four Pakistani tanks and twenty-eight Malaysian armored personnel carriers (APCs).<sup>50</sup> This force would take some time to plan and organize, thus the isolated elements of TF Ranger in Aidid's stronghold had to strong point their positions and hold out for assistance.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 339.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 200.

<sup>48</sup>This unit, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry was the alert company for the QRF. As such, they were on 30-minute alert upon notification that TF Ranger was preparing for an operation. When requested by the TF Ranger liaison, the QRF Company was forced by enemy presence to take a circuitous route to the airfield, arriving at the TF Ranger base at 5:24 P.M. DeLong and Tuckey, *Mogadishu!*, xii.

<sup>49</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 147.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 263-264.

In the vicinity of the Wolcott crash site, the disparate elements of TF Ranger were attempting to determine where all of their forces were and establish a working direct fire plan. Meanwhile, AH6 “Little Bird” light attack helicopters were performing heroic service, executing gun and rocket runs to keep the Somali armed mobs from overrunning the TF Ranger positions. The situation began to stabilize as night fell, but concern for the many wounded, dwindling supplies of ammunition, and lack of water and night vision gear began to put pressure on commanders.<sup>51</sup> As night fell, TF Ranger helicopters hovered over the strong points to deliver desperately needed water, medical supplies, and ammunition. Thus, the men of TF Ranger hunkered down, established and marked their perimeters, attempted to care for their wounded, and waited for the promised relief column.

At 11:30 P.M. the relief column departed the New Port base of the Pakistani forces.<sup>52</sup> The plan that LTC David had developed included two separate forces: the largest, to move to the Wolcott crash site and extract the embattled men of TF Ranger and a second, smaller force to move to the Durant crash site and search for survivors. The columns would move together initially, and then separate to move to the different crash sites.<sup>53</sup>

As the relief convoy moved through the narrow streets of Mogadishu, they ran a gauntlet of Somali fire. Two of the Malaysian APCs took a wrong turn and were ambushed on a side street by a group of Somalis.<sup>54</sup> The remainder of the convoy moved to their assigned objectives,

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<sup>51</sup> As a result of the impossibility of medical evacuation from this position, Corporal Jamie Smith died of wounds received during this battle, bleeding to death in a Somali hut. Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 242-243.

<sup>52</sup> DeLong and Tuckey, *Mogadishu!*, xii.

<sup>53</sup> Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 271.

<sup>54</sup> DeLong and Tuckey, *Mogadishu!*, 68-69.



with hard fighting all the way, eventually linking up with the beleaguered soldiers of TF Ranger at the Wolcott crash site and finding the wreckage of *Super Six Four* at the Durant crash site.<sup>55</sup>

At the Wolcott crash site, elements of the relief convoy established an expanded perimeter, giving some respite to the members of TF Ranger who had already been in contact for almost twelve hours. As a result of the arrival of the heavily armed relief column, enemy contact at the Wolcott crash site greatly diminished. The wounded were loaded into the Malaysian APCs to provide some level of safety, while they waited for the relief column to depart the crash site. The final tasks were to remove Wolcott's remains from the wreckage of *Super Six One* and for the leaders of TF Ranger to account for all of their soldiers and load them onto the vehicles of the relief convoy. Unfortunately, it took over three hours to extract Wolcott's remains from the wreckage, and the soldiers of TF Ranger and the relief convoy did not depart the crash site until the sun had started to rise.<sup>56</sup> The chaos and confusion of the extraction, coupled with the haste of the convoy drivers to be out of the area once the cloak of darkness had lifted, caused approximately forty members of TF Ranger to be left running behind the quickly departing convoy, having to fight their way out on foot.<sup>57</sup> These soldiers eventually caught up with the vehicles when the convoy halted outside the Somali cordon.

As the Task Force and the relief convoy arrived at the Mogadishu soccer stadium, noncommissioned officers (NCOs) accounted for their soldiers and determined casualties, while medical personnel worked to treat the many casualties. The final cost of the Battle of the Black Sea was eighteen US soldiers killed and over seventy wounded. From the Somali standpoint, 3

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<sup>55</sup>At the Durant crash site, members of TF Ranger who had accompanied the relief column used thermite grenades to destroy the wreckage, ensuring that the Somalis could not salvage valuable military hardware from the downed helicopter.

<sup>56</sup>DeLong and Tuckey, *Mogadishu!*, xii.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 94.

October became known as the “Day of the Rangers.”<sup>58</sup> From MG Garrison’s standpoint, his force had just delivered a crushing blow to Aidid’s Habr Gedir; therefore, the time had come to exploit the victory, but orders from Washington precluded further military action.<sup>59</sup>

### In Retrospect

The Battle of the Black Sea was a tactical victory for TF Ranger, but a Pyrrhic one at best. They had gone into Aidid’s stronghold, captured two of his top lieutenants and numerous other subordinate clan leaders, and had withdrawn with relatively light casualties considering the odds that they faced. The Somalis had suffered greatly as a result of the battle, with the awesome firepower of the US military inflicting an estimated 1,000 casualties, with at least 500 dead.<sup>60</sup> Whether a victory or not at the tactical level, this battle signaled a failure at the strategic level of war.

Most Americans believed that US Forces were in Somalia as part of a UN humanitarian operation to bring food to the starving populace of an African nation. As the news media began reporting in the aftermath of the battle, the large numbers of casualties shocked the average American, who likely had not heard of TF Ranger or Mohamed Farah Aidid. Thus, the American people demanded answers from the government. Unfortunately, the significant casualties, suffered in a small raid, also shocked the Clinton administration. The President was unable to justify these casualty figures with ambiguous national aims and lacked the resolve to continue the fight. Thus, on 5 October 1993, President Clinton, in a meeting with his top national security advisors, decided to withdraw all US troops from Somalia by March 1994. Tactical victory

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<sup>58</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 331.

<sup>59</sup>MG (Ret) William Garrison, interview by author, tape recording, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 21 January 2003.

<sup>60</sup>Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*, 333.

notwithstanding, the US had lost in Somalia, leaving many to echo the question posed by President Clinton, “How could this happen?”<sup>61</sup>

As with the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the affects of the Victory Disease answer this question. In the case of TF Ranger in Mogadishu, the arrogant belief in the superiority of US forces combined with a complacent underestimation of the Somali opponent. Along with these symptoms came the use of an established pattern by the members of TF Ranger, allowing the Somalis to seize the initiative. In seizing the initiative, the Somalis were able to inflict significant casualties upon the US force, ultimately causing the US administration to abandon the mission in Somalia and withdraw US forces in “defeat.”

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 304.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SEARCH FOR A VACCINE

The haunting question asked by President Clinton as a result of the loss in Somalia might be asked about any military defeat, and was certainly asked by a shocked nation in the wake of the defeat at the Little Bighorn. To truly understand how as powerful a nation as the US can be defeated by an “inferior” foe requires an in-depth analysis of the symptoms of the Victory Disease. Once one truly understands these symptoms, the quest for a vaccine becomes much simpler.

It will be recalled that military analysts James Dunnigan and Raymond Macedonia in highlighting the concept of the Victory Disease described the symptoms of arrogance, complacency, and a habit of using established patterns. This study has only briefly highlighted these symptoms, claiming that they contributed to defeat in the two historical examples. In this chapter, a more in-depth analysis of the symptoms will prove that the Victory Disease was a proximate cause in both defeats, though the question remains, How to vaccinate current military leaders and planners to the effects of the Victory Disease?

#### The Symptoms Analyzed

The Victory Disease evolves from a compounding of its symptoms, which if left unchecked makes any military operation highly susceptible to failure. As illustrated by the case studies, this debilitating disease can occur at any of the three levels of war, tactical, operational, or strategic. Many historical examples of the Victory Disease exist, but this monograph focuses primarily on the case studies. Thus, by using the case studies to analyze how the Victory Disease finds its way into the plan, this monograph will further examine each of the symptoms and how this disease grows within a plan.

### Setting the Conditions

Certain pre-conditions are requisite for the infection of the Victory Disease to occur. Most importantly, the nation and its military must be powerful and have a history of military prowess, clearly illustrated by recent victories. In many cases, military forces that have recently suffered an ignominious defeat are quick to analyze their failings and take corrective action, while victorious militaries rarely analyze their recent victories in search of ways to improve. While this is not always the case, history more often records the phoenix rising from the ashes, than the victor going through a thorough analysis of a recent victory to find areas for improvement.<sup>1</sup> Based on the requirement for vast national strength and a proven military, clearly, the US is currently susceptible to falling prey to the effects of the Victory Disease.

### Arrogance

The growth of the Victory Disease starts with arrogance, which has its roots in pride. National pride in past military accomplishment is a natural human tendency, yet is also the breeding ground for arrogance. As arrogance grows, it is easy to observe a “snowballing effect,” in which the growth of this symptom begins at higher levels and builds as it filters down through the organization.

A nation with a strong, proven military and a highly developed economy will almost naturally display national pride, which may easily develop into arrogance. Arrogance on the national level manifests itself in the leadership and the general populace, leading to an expectation for quick, decisive victories in almost any undertaking, especially a military conflict. At the strategic level of war, senior military leaders begin to believe that there is almost no

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<sup>1</sup>Many historians and military analysts cite the example of the German Army following the invasion of Poland, as a case in which a successful military force honestly assessed its failings after a victory and made improvements to their system and doctrine. Although this occurred, it must be noted that while Hitler and his party elite were inspired by the quick victory of German arms, his generals saw many deficiencies in their system that they felt sure would be exploited by a more competent adversary. Thus, this example essentially supports either side of this argument.

possibility that their vastly superior forces may be defeated. At the lower levels of war (operational and tactical), military units take on the arrogance of the organization as a whole, embracing the strategic level arrogance, while fostering a more personal unit-specific arrogance based on the battlefield victories of their particular unit. Perhaps the greatest problem with arrogance is that it leads to unrealistic expectations, from the national level down to the lowest unit.

In the case of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, arrogance was evident across the various levels of war. This arrogance was primarily evident in a feeling of invincibility that existed at the national level, filtering down to the ranks of the 7th Cavalry Regiment, and a disdain for the combat capability of their Indian adversary. At the national strategic level, this arrogance resulted from several factors. First, the recent victory over the Confederacy convinced many within the US of the almost invincible nature of the Union. This invincibility, coupled with a resurgence of Manifest Destiny, led the majority of the population to believe that nothing could stand in the way of a committed US. President Grant and Generals Sherman and Sheridan viewed the frontier army as perfectly capable of forcing the hostiles onto the reservation, offering a military solution to a problem that diplomacy could not solve. At the lower tactical level of war, the leaders and members of the 7th Cavalry displayed a remarkable level of arrogance. This arrogance was clearly demonstrated in Custer's attitude toward his Indian adversaries and their ability to face his regiment. During the 1868 Battle of the Washita, when a subordinate speculated that they might find more Indians than they could handle, Custer reportedly said, "There are not enough Indians in the country to whip the Seventh Cavalry."<sup>2</sup> Custer's arrogance seems to have also afflicted his subordinates, leading many of them to believe in the invincibility

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<sup>2</sup>Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 65.

of their regiment.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this symptom obviously afflicted national and military leaders in 1875 and 1876.

In, 1993, TF Ranger was also affected by the symptom of arrogance; only in this case it was far more evident at the higher levels, vice the tactical level of war. The symptom of arrogance manifested itself not only through a belief in the invincibility of US forces, but also a belief at the highest levels that TF Ranger could not fail to accomplish its assigned mission. Less than three years before, the US military had achieved an unprecedented victory over Iraq in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, defeating the Iraqi army in a 100-hour ground offensive and suffering few US casualties in the process. As hostilities in Somalia began to mount, the newly installed Clinton administration began to search for military solutions to the problem. According to MG Garrison, the Clinton administration was desperate for a solution, being constantly pressured by Admiral Howe and senior UN leaders, finally yielding to this pressure more out of ignorance than arrogance.<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that his senior military commanders, including MG Garrison and General Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explained that the mission to capture Aidid was virtually impossible, President Clinton still authorized the commitment of TF Ranger to Somalia. One cannot help but believe that while his senior military officers were expressing doubts that they could capture Aidid, President Clinton must still have believed that the Somalis could not possibly defeat the elite soldiers of TF Ranger, and the actions to dismantle Aidid's infrastructure would likely reduce his threat to UN and American forces. At the tactical level of war, the elite forces that filled the ranks of TF

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<sup>3</sup>In a statement vaguely reminiscent of boasts made by Captain William J. Fetterman before the complete destruction of his command in 1866, Lieutenant Varnum is quoted as saying on the banks of the Little Bighorn, "There are enough of us here to whip the entire Sioux nation." Camp, *Custer in '76*, 107.

<sup>4</sup>MG (Ret) William Garrison, interview by author, tape recording, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 21 January 2003.

Ranger were by the nature of their elite status very self-confident.<sup>5</sup> These elements viewed their unit as possessing a lucky quality, which made their forces nearly invincible and also made many of them, especially at the lower levels, believe that they would likely capture Aidid.<sup>6</sup> To the elite soldiers of TF Ranger, facing the armed Somali mobs, the loss of initiative and the sudden feelings of vulnerability came as quite a shock.<sup>7</sup> Thus, much like during the Battle of the Little Bighorn, national leaders, senior military leaders, and even actual battle participants went into operations in Mogadishu with a dangerously arrogant attitude that would be quickly lost as casualties mounted.

The symptom of arrogance is clearly rooted in the conditions that make the Victory Disease possible, growing out of a nation's strength and proven military prowess. This arrogance leads the nation's leadership, populace, and military leaders to believe that victory is almost a foregone conclusion. Thus, arrogance, in turn, sets the stage for the growth of the next symptom.

### Complacency

As arrogance flourishes, the symptom of complacency begins to grow. It stems from the arrogant belief that one's own forces are unstoppable and invincible; thus, one begins to become complacent, primarily in the planning of operations. Nowhere in the planning process is this complacency more evident than in the analysis of the enemy, examining his culture to determine his likely courses of action. This superficial understanding of the enemy's culture makes it

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<sup>5</sup>The self-confidence of these elite soldiers is evident in the decision to not bring along all of their standard equipment on this mission. Since this was to be a quick, daylight raid, the soldiers did not bring along night vision devices (NODs) that they desperately needed after the sun set. In addition, since they believed that they would return from this mission quickly (about one hour), additional ammunition took the place of the normal complement of water. The leaders and soldiers of TF Ranger did not seem to believe that the enemy could possibly do something to prevent them from returning to their base according to the plan.

<sup>6</sup>LTC Scott Miller, interview by author, notes, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 31 January 2003.

<sup>7</sup>Casper, *Falcon Brigade*, 38-39.



virtually impossible to determine how he might react to one's actions.<sup>8</sup> This complacency is also evident in very superficial plans, again based on the belief that the enemy is nearly incapable of affecting friendly actions, due to the supposed superiority of friendly forces. Thus, complacency, while most evident in the planning process, yields very poorly developed plans based on the belief that the mere superiority of one's own force will ensure that it prevails easily.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn is an excellent example of complacency affecting the outcome of a battle, with this symptom occurring, again, at all levels of war. This sense of complacency is most evident in the planning of this operation. At the strategic level of war, complacency led to a flawed plan. Initially, President Grant's ultimatum to the "roamers," requiring their surrender at various agencies not later than 31 January 1876, was an impossible task based on the winter climate of the Northern Plains, and is indicative of a very superficial analysis of the general plan.<sup>9</sup> The eagerness of Generals Sherman and Sheridan to execute a winter campaign was admirable, but obviously had not been well thought out and planned, since two of the three envisioned converging columns were unable to mount expeditions due to the climate and inadequate preparation. In both of these strategic level examples, one observes the symptom of complacency illustrated by poor analysis and planning. As one examines the tactical level of war, perhaps the most striking absence is in the area of cultural intelligence. Although Custer had been on the Plains for almost ten years, he still did not understand the Indian culture, thus he lacked the capability to realistically predict the hostile reaction to a given stimuli. In

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<sup>8</sup>Aldous Huxley's concept of "vincible ignorance" is appropriate in regards to the US military's lack of emphasis on cultural intelligence. Based on "vincible ignorance," one knows that he is ignorant of the enemy's culture, but does not regard an understanding of the enemy's culture as essential to victory. This lack of cultural intelligence is unimportant since one's own force is invincible and the enemy is virtually impotent. Douglas Scalard, "People of Whom We Know Nothing: When Doctrine Isn't Enough" [article on-line]; available from <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/julaug97/scalard.htm>; Internet; accessed on 22 February 2003.

<sup>9</sup>The other possible reason for setting this nearly impossible to attain cutoff date was that President Grant and his military commanders were trying to force a war that would hopefully provide a more lasting solution to the problem, through a defeat of the Sioux Nation.

essence, Custer maintained a very superficial understanding of Indian common reactions to friendly actions, but scarcely understood the “why” behind these reactions.<sup>10</sup> Complacency led Custer to underestimate the size of the enemy force and its fighting prowess. Lieutenant Charles Varnum, the 7th Cavalry Chief of Scouts, related the dire warnings passed to Custer by his scouts regarding the vast size of the village ahead, but Custer refused to believe these frontier veterans.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Lieutenant Edward Godfrey was warned by frontier scout Mitch Bouyer that a huge encampment lay ahead.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Custer did not even attempt to gain intelligence regarding the size and composition of the Indian village after crossing the Divide, instead he positioned his scouts to screen his advance approximately two miles forward of his main body, thus limiting his own ability to develop a coherent plan of attack, until he was almost upon the village. Thus, as with arrogance, the symptom of complacency is clearly illustrated by this case study.

In the case of TF Ranger, complacency, as with arrogance, is most obvious at the higher levels, and as with the example provided by the Battle of the Little Bighorn is most evident in the planning for this operation. At the national level, the majority of the political leadership, along with the American people, had exorcised the ghosts of Vietnam, thanks in large part to the recent and resounding success of the US-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War. Essentially, America, as a whole, no longer feared defeat when committing her military, thus had become less concerned about military deployments. This complacency was compounded by the fact that the average American believed that US forces in Somalia were conducting nothing more than humanitarian

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<sup>10</sup>While approaching the Little Bighorn, Custer had no reason to lack cultural intelligence on the Sioux, due to his exceptional Indian scouts. Custer’s Indian scout force was composed primarily of Crow and Arikara scouts, with four Agency Sioux assisting in leading the soldiers to the encampment. These scouts were also an excellent source of information regarding the actions and reactions of the hostile Sioux.

<sup>11</sup>Camp, *Custer in ’76*, 61.

<sup>12</sup>Godfrey, *Custer’s Last Fight*, 17.

assistance, thus were quite shocked by the casualties of 3 and 4 October.<sup>13</sup> The Clinton administration's ignorance of the situation and the capabilities of its military forces is itself a sign of complacency, as those political leaders responsible for the commitment of TF Ranger could not even be bothered to understand what it was that they were asking these soldiers to do. Thus, the politicians did not seem to want to be bothered with details, but only wanted results. At the tactical level of war, one finds another example of leaders and soldiers underestimating the enemy. According to LTC Scott Miller, the SOF ground assault force commander, the members of TF Ranger had underestimated the enemy and were taken by surprise by the rapid massing of Somali clansmen and the heavy volume of fire that the enemy was able to put out, especially in terms of RPGs.<sup>14</sup> Thus, due to complacency, higher-level plans lacked thorough analysis, and tactical leaders found themselves surprised by a far better prepared enemy than they had expected.

National strength and a history of success led to arrogance. Arrogance, in turn, as a result of a belief that one's forces could not fail, led to complacency. Due to the compounding nature of the symptoms, complacency sets military leaders and planners up to habitually use established patterns, thus making them highly susceptible to losing the initiative if the enemy chooses not to follow established reactions.

#### Using Established Patterns

As a result of the unchecked growth of arrogance and complacency, the nation and its military leaders and planners too often begin to believe that a standard approach will work for many scenarios. But, the use of patterns leaves one's forces susceptible to danger, as the thinking enemy's reaction forms the critical factor. If one's forces use a "proven" pattern to solve similar

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<sup>13</sup>Rick Atkinson, "The Raid That Went Wrong: How an Elite U.S. Force Failed in Somalia," *The Washington Post*, 30 January 1994, A1.

<sup>14</sup>LTC Scott Miller, interview by author, notes, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 31 January 2003.

problems, and the enemy reacts in a “standard” fashion, then one’s forces will likely have success. The danger comes about when the enemy refuses to play properly, and reacts in a new and different manner. Since a force afflicted by the Victory Disease has simply gone through the motions of planning, the unexpected enemy reaction will likely so shock the friendly force that the enemy will gain the initiative. Yielding the initiative to the enemy becomes the most likely cause for the defeat that is moments from occurring. Thus, one sees the culmination of the cumulative effects of the Victory Disease as an enemy who has learned to adapt defeats the friendly force.

The Centennial Campaign and the Battle of the Little Bighorn clearly illustrate this culmination of the symptoms into a fatal case of the Victory Disease. At the national level, President Grant’s edict ordering the hostiles to the reservations by 31 January 1876, coupled with his threat to compel the Indians by force, if necessary, alerted the Indians that the frontier army would be coming for them. Typically, if the Indians believed that the Army was attempting to bring them to battle, they would disperse and lead the US forces on a fruitless, drawn-out pursuit. Instead of following their normal pattern, this the Indians united, forming an enormous village for protection. At the tactical level of war, Custer issued orders that dispersed his forces. Custer dispersed his forces for two reasons, both of which were due to established patterns.<sup>15</sup> These patterns had been formed on battlefields, such as the Washita and the Powder River, and had been successful in the past. Unfortunately, for the members of the 7th Cavalry, the Indian reaction was not to flee; instead they attacked Custer’s divided command and overwhelmed his battalion. This sudden change of Indian reaction allowed the Indians to seize the initiative, thus sealing the fate of Custer’s command.

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<sup>15</sup>Since Custer was unaware of the exact location and disposition of the Indian village, dispersion allowed him to protect his force by preventing unanticipated attacks to the flank of his force. This disposition also allowed for the 7th Cavalry to strike the enemy from several different directions, simultaneously.

In the case of Mogadishu, one clearly sees the impact of using established patterns. Throughout the early summer, the attempts by UN forces to disarm the clans had led to an escalation of violence between UNOSOM II and the Habr Gedir clan. This escalation of conflict actually forced the US military to react to the Somalis. At the lower tactical levels, the members of TF Ranger had conducted missions using similar tactics six times in the preceding month. While the use of signature flights attempted to mislead the Somalis, these had not worked as well as anticipated.<sup>16</sup> Journalist Rick Atkinson quoted a Somali militia commander as saying, “If you use one tactic twice, you should not use it third time, and the Americans already had done basically the same thing six times.”<sup>17</sup> Whether there was any way to avoid it or not, TF Ranger had become predictable, and now all that remained was for the enemy to change his reaction, which is exactly what occurred on 3 October 1993. Instead of simply attacking the Americans with unorganized mobs of armed Somalis, the militia formed units, complete with command and control, and the basics of direct fire planning. With this change in enemy reaction came the new focus of engaging helicopters with massed RPG fire, and then isolating the trapped Americans within the city.<sup>18</sup> This was the primary change that allowed the Somalis to seize the initiative and resulted in the significant US casualties during the Battle of the Black Sea. Thus, the Mogadishu case study clearly illustrates the effect of falling prey to this final symptom of the Victory Disease.

Based on this thorough analysis of the compounding effect of these symptoms, it is easy to see how this disease affects national and military leadership. As the symptoms grow like a cancer in the plan, the nation and its military inch closer to failure. At the lower tactical levels, a force that succumbs to the effects of the Victory Disease is likely only to lose a battle, while at

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<sup>16</sup>Casper, *Falcon Brigade*, 37.

<sup>17</sup>Atkinson, “The Raid That Went Wrong,” A27.

<sup>18</sup>Once US forces were pinned down in the city, the Somalis shifted their focus to preventing a relief convoy from moving to the aid of the isolated force.

the strategic level, this disease may more likely yield a national failure, as in the case of Mogadishu. The use of established patterns is a final step toward a terminal case of the Victory Disease.

### The Vaccine

Armed with a thorough understanding of the symptoms of the Victory Disease, the quest for way to vaccinate national and military leaders and planners begins. Since the result of the Victory Disease is failure, real or perceived, the need for a vaccine is obvious, but unfortunately, the vaccine is also so obvious that many cannot see it. Today, many US military leaders seek technological solutions to battlefield problems, through increased reliance on computerized analytical tools and sensors, but in seeking a vaccine for the Victory Disease, these technological solutions fall short.

The only real vaccine that will protect a nation and her military from falling prey to the effects of the Victory Disease is awareness of the disease and its symptoms. National and military leaders must be aware that this debilitating disease is attempting to work its way into any plan, provided the initial necessary pre-conditions exist. The military leader and planner must understand that these symptoms most often creep into the plan through assumptions made during the planning process, but bear their poison fruit during execution. Thus, by continually testing the validity of assumptions during the planning process, one can limit the possibility of falling prey to the Victory Disease.

The awareness of the symptoms and understanding the root causes of the disease is the vaccine. The next question becomes how to vaccinate those most susceptible to succumbing to the Victory Disease.

## CHAPTER 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Since awareness provides the vaccine for the Victory Disease, the senior military leadership must determine how to increase the awareness of leaders and planners to this debilitating affliction. Increasing the awareness of the nation's leaders and populace far exceeds the scope of this monograph, but recommending ways to vaccinate military, more specifically US Army, officers is the goal of this paper. Thus, the question becomes how to raise the level of awareness of US Army leaders and planners to the dangers of the Victory Disease.

#### When, Where, and How to Conduct Vaccinations

The best way to vaccinate the US Army Officer Corps to the effects of the Victory Disease is through the Officer Education System (OES), since the officer corps learns military theory, doctrine, and tactics in the various levels of the OES. Currently, the system consists of training and educational courses at the company- and field-grade levels.<sup>1</sup> The education system is broken down into four general levels, initially focusing on branch-specific training, then transitioning to more general training at the higher levels.<sup>2</sup> Since the OES is how officers learn their profession, it becomes the most obvious place to vaccinate the US Army Officer Corps.

The vaccine is available through the study of military history. Currently, each level of the US Army OES includes a study of military history, with a slightly different focus in each

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<sup>1</sup>Company-grade officers hold the ranks of lieutenant and captain, while field-grade officers are majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels.

<sup>2</sup>Newly commissioned lieutenants attend a branch-specific officer basic course (OBC), which focuses primarily on training the officer on branch-specific tactics, with only limited education. Upon promotion to the rank of captain, the officer attends a branch-specific captain's career course (CCC), which again focuses on training, but with an increasing emphasis on education. In conjunction with the branch-specific CCC, junior captains also attend a staff officer course, designed to train them on the skills necessary to perform staff duties at the brigade-level and below. With promotion to the rank of major, each officer receives education through the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. At the senior lieutenant colonel level, selected officers attend senior service college. Currently, the US Army is in the process of adjusting its OES.

level. At the lower company-grade level, the study focuses on learning American military history and teaching officers the lineage of the military. As officers progress in rank, the focus shifts to a study of the evolution of military action and theory, attempting to broaden an officer's understanding of the roots of current doctrine and tactics. In order to vaccinate the officer corps to the effects of the Victory Disease, each of these levels of the education system must incorporate the study and analysis of failed campaigns.

Along with the case studies highlighted in this paper, several other historical examples seem very appropriate for educating officers regarding the effects of the Victory Disease. For each time period studied, attempts must be made to find a campaign afflicted by the Victory Disease, in order to continually reinforce the concept.

The British experience during the Zulu Wars of the late nineteenth century clearly illustrates the symptoms of the Victory Disease. In the late nineteenth century, when the British attempted to colonize the majority of southern Africa, war with the native Zulu population became inevitable. On 22 January 1879 a vastly superior Zulu force attacked a British encampment, annihilating the British force in the Battle of Isandlwana.<sup>3</sup> This battle provides an excellent case study in the Victory Disease, which when analyzed in conjunction with the Battle of Rourke's Drift, a British victory which occurred the following day, offers an opportunity to compare victory and failure.

The early stages of the 1973 Yom Kippur War found the Israelis initially afflicted by a case of the Victory Disease. In this example, the Israelis, as a result of their resounding successes during the 1967 Six Day War, believed that their forces were vastly superior to any possible Arab force. Due to this arrogance, the Israelis posted only limited forces along their borders with Egypt (in the Sinai, along the Bar-Lev Line) and Syria (the Golan Heights), trusting these forces

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<sup>3</sup>“The Battle of Isandlwana: Wet with Yesterday's Blood” [article on-line]; available from [http://www.battlefields.co.za/history/anglo-zulu\\_war/isandlwana/isandlwana\\_ian%20knight.htm](http://www.battlefields.co.za/history/anglo-zulu_war/isandlwana/isandlwana_ian%20knight.htm); Internet; accessed on 13 December 2002.



to delay an Arab offensive long enough to allow the Israeli reserve forces to mobilize.<sup>4</sup> This arrogance almost cost Israel its first defeat at the hands of their Arab enemies, a defeat that due to the small size of the nation of Israel might possibly have resulted in complete destruction of the Jewish state. This example is perhaps most interesting in that it did not result in a defeat, but the conditions for failure certainly existed, and the first several days of battle were traumatic for the Israeli leadership.

Thus, the case studies highlighted in this paper and the above-mentioned campaigns, along with a host of others, provide excellent examples of the effect of the Victory Disease. Incorporating their study into the curriculum of the higher-level courses within the OES and highlighting the effects of the Victory Disease will yield the increased awareness necessary to limit the risk of the US Army contracting this deadly disease. Along with awareness of the potential problem of the Victory Disease, military leaders and planners must learn to look for the symptoms of the disease within the plan.

Armed with this increased awareness of the potential problem, military leaders and planners must then constantly test their assumptions during planning, looking for signs of arrogance and complacency. It is likely within these assumptions that the symptoms will manifest themselves. When developing a course of action, military leaders and planners must, likewise, be wary of using established patterns. Thus, by knowing the symptoms and being continually on the look out for them, the military leader and planner may avoid falling prey to the effects of the Victory Disease.

### The Road Ahead

As the US moves ever closer to war with Iraq, the necessary conditions exist today for the US to fall victim to the effects of the Victory Disease. The US' role as the sole global

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<sup>4</sup>Avraham Adan, *On the Banks of the Suez: An Israeli General's Personal Account of the Yom Kippur War* (Jerusalem: Edanim Publishers, 1979), 5.

superpower, combined with her vast economic strength and history of military prowess make her an excellent breeding ground for the Victory Disease. These characteristics are all things to be proud of, but unfortunately, this national pride has the potential of developing into arrogance.

The resounding tactical success of the US-led coalition during Operation Desert Storm predisposes US forces to fall prey to arrogance and complacency, viewing their own forces as vastly superior to the enemy. As a result of the recent military successes in Afghanistan, US military leaders and planners have little reason to doubt that their military personnel are well trained and very capable of accomplishing any mission. In both of these operations, the US military suffered limited casualties, leaving the nation's leaders and populace, along with many military leaders, to believe that yet again their military will achieve a quick, nearly bloodless victory. This potentially unrealistic expectation is one of the many results of the Victory Disease.

Finally, US forces must avoid using established patterns. In the case of a future war with Iraq, Saddam Hussein has suffered a recent defeat at the hands of a US-led coalition; therefore, he is more likely to have learned from his previous failings and this time to be prepared. The Iraqi dictator has had every reason to analyze his 1990-1991 Gulf War failure, but the question becomes, Did Hussein make the necessary corrections to his doctrine and force structure?

The purpose of this monograph is not the erosion of self-confidence at the various levels of war, but instead, to highlight the need for constant analysis of enemy and friendly forces. The US military must constantly seek a better understanding of the enemy and be wary of underestimating any adversary. Likewise, national and military leaders must be cognizant of the capabilities and limitations of their own forces, to ensure that they are tasked according to those capabilities. The overall goal is to ensure that the US military is able to maintain the initiative, force the enemy to react, and ultimately defeat any adversary. Having been exposed to the potential for failure, the real question is, Will the US Army devote itself to increasing the awareness of its officers to the debilitating effects of the Victory Disease?

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